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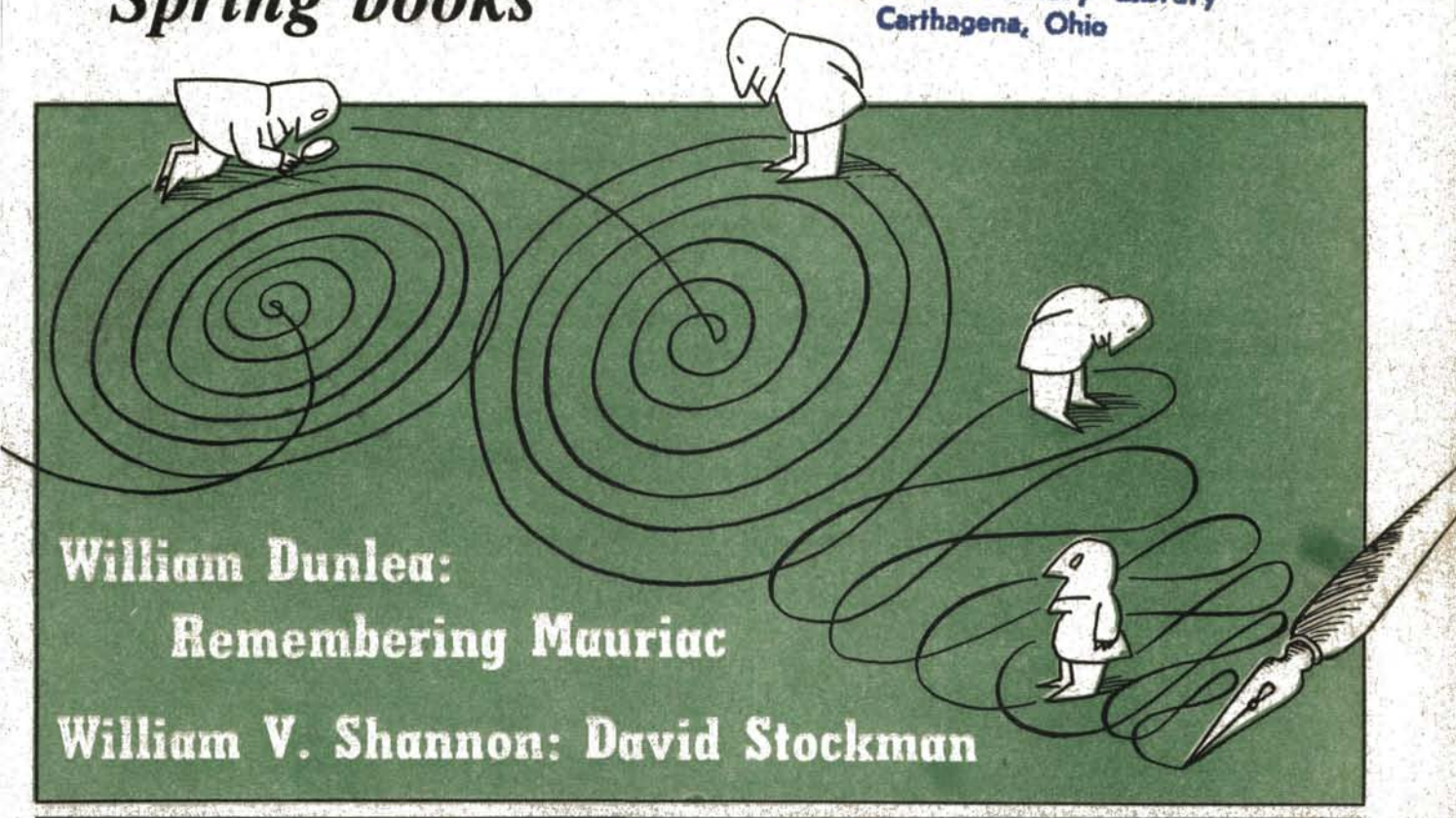

William Dunlea: Remembering Mauriac

William V. Shannon: David Stockman

Barbara A. Bannon: le Carré's 'Perfect Spy' • Robert Jones: Robert Stone's 'Children' • Theophane Boyd: Tarot Spirituality • David Toolan: Cult of the Computer • Frederick Franck: 'Images of God the Mother' • Ronald Christ: 'I the Supreme'

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Correspondence

A serious tickle

Brooklyn, N.Y.

To the Editors: The editorial, "Ecce Vir," [April 11] advances that oft expressed statement of frustration — *If* it weren't so serious, I'd have to laugh — to a more tenable position in a frail and fallible church: *Because* it is so serious, we have to laugh.

Your ruminations about the bishop of Pittsburgh's foot fetish forbidding females from having theirs washed on Maundy Thursday provided the wit that is so helpful in probing the wisdom in the historical event. Ecclesiastical preoccupation with the letter of the law overlooks the spirit in Jesus' model lesson of equality and service.

"If I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, how much *more* ought you to wash one another's feet." More, not less, or fewer, or selectively. Certainly not from the Lord who also advised, "Go out to the highways and biways and compel them to come in." Certainly that included women. With feet.

When the laughter released by your editorial subsides there remain, alas, many estranged Catholics, including women whose return to the Lord's table is (stumbling) blocked by exclusionary clauses such as that published by Bishop Bevilacqua.

Let us hope that the resistance within his own diocese will encourage him to acknowledge, as does your editorial, that "Feet and reason at . . . times stumble."

CAMILLE D'ARIENZO, RSM

Erasmus's daughter

New York, N.Y.

To the Editors: Congratulations to you and to your readers on the return of Abigail McCarthy to your columns. She writes in the great tradition of humane letters, building bridges of understanding across the gaps responsible for the antagonisms which freeze the divisions among us by blocking communication between us.

The note struck in her latest call for civility in debate and consideration in contact ["Infectious Incivilitis," April 11] typifies the mission we have learned to entrust to this worthy daughter of Erasmus. Translating my respect for her leadership into my concern for my own craft, economics will not be harnessed to serve us until economists discipline themselves to discern the functional realities obscured by statistical operations, and to give exercises in observation a fair hearing against sloganized thinking. Long may Mrs. McCarthy's wisdom and eloquence grace your columns.

ELIOT JANEWAY

That prophetic edge

Toledo, Ohio

To the Editors: Roger Parker may believe that the world has ended in Zimbabwe ["A Tangled Revolution," February 28], but I believe it would be more accurate to say that that country, and the Catholic church within it, is going through the growing pains of adolescence. Having visited the country within the past year, spending some time with missionaries from my own diocese, I would challenge Parker's assertion that ". . . religion in general seems to be an ineffectual formalism with no practical import."

I can understand how a cursory examination of church activities within the main cities of Zimbabwe might lead one to that conclusion. My own experience of liturgy at the cathedral in Harare, for example, was hardly inspiring. It is a mistake, however, to judge this country or the Catholic church within it on the basis of life within the two largest cities. The young communities of Christians in the small towns and villages are full of life and enthusiasm. These communities, primarily lay-led, are beginning to take responsibility for maintaining and expanding the Christian faith within their culture. Surely, problems do exist, but the situation does not seem as hopeless as Father Parker would like us to believe.

I also believe that his article develops a "worst-case scenario" for governmental and church policies in Zimbabwe. I am certainly not overly optimistic about the political situation of the country, and the recent elections, completed while I was in the country, seem to have reinforced the polarization of forces. However, I don't believe that the church has completely lost her prophetic edge. Furthermore, I believe that Mugabe has to realize that he cannot achieve his one-party ideal on his own terms. What concerns me more at the present time is the impact which an explosion of the situation in South Africa would have on Zimbabwe. I know our own missionaries are concerned about this powder keg to the South.

Maybe Zimbabwe is in a sort of purgatory at the present time. But this purgatory can be an opportunity for the country to reassess its direction and reflect upon the principles of reconciliation which helped launch the nation in 1980. This will only happen if the church continues to work as a prophetic voice within the country. We cannot despair simply because the revolution has tripped upon some stones in the way.

FR. DAVID BRUNING

Proper quibbling

Harare, Zimbabwe

To the Editors: Everyone here in Zimbabwe missed the "explosion of 1981," which Roger Parker keeps referring to in his foolishly confused report ["A Tangled Revolution," February 28]. White minority rule actually ended in 1980.

If Parker's article thoughtfully explored any of the confusing and complex realities of Zimbabwe, I wouldn't

(Continued on page 319)

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Staff

Editor: Peter Steinfels
Assistant Editors: David Toolan, Karen Sue Smith, Patrick Jordan
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Advertising Manager: Ruth E. Taylor
Publisher: Edward S. Skillin

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LAMENT FOR CHERNOBYL

OVER TWO centuries ago, the great Hasidic master, the Baal Shem Tov (d. 1760), asked his disciple, Rabbi Nahum of Chernobyl (d. 1798), why in the prayer sequence known as the Lamentations at Midnight, both the names Rachel and Leah were included. Rabbi Nahum replied that what Rachel effects with her joy, Leah effects with her tears.

The anguish that has descended on the Ukraine, and Chernobyl in particular, since the midnight explosion at the nuclear power station on April 26 is likely to remain for years. Its relief may only be effected by the tears and lamentations of many Leahs, many Rachels, over many generations, and across many borders.

The Chernobyl disaster has reconstituted a seemingly limitless series of questions and concerns — from the scientific, to the political, to the psychic. What is a foolproof nuclear reactor? What are the bonds of human community in the atomic age? Who controls *the* "power," and do they really "control" *it*? Will Chernobyl's children's children curse April 26 as the real April Fool's Day? Will spring ever be the same in the Ukraine?

Outside the human tragedy that has enveloped the victims of Chernobyl, that makes sleep uneasy in Kiev, Poland, and the Northern Hemisphere, two questions are likely to have the most intense half-lives for Americans. Can nuclear energy be safe? And, will we ever be able to trust the Soviets?

The U.S., it must be remembered, has more operational nuclear reactors than any country in the world (98 of a total of 375), and twice as many as the Soviet Union's 50. Although most U.S. reactors are of differing and supposedly safer designs than the Chernobyl plant, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) estimates there is a significant possibility of a nuclear meltdown in the U.S. in the next twenty years. This is even less encouraging when one is reminded that the Ukrainian Power Minister, Vitali Sklyarov, boasted in *Soviet Life* last February that "the odds of a meltdown [at Chernobyl] are one in ten thousand years."

The cleanup after the partial meltdown at Pennsylvania's Three Mile Island is another disquieting element of the safety question. Although that "incident" was well contained as compared to Chernobyl, the cleanup still continues seven years after the accident. It will take another three years to complete, at a cost exceeding a billion dollars. The cleanup at Chernobyl may take even longer.

Thank our atoms, most nuclear reactors will probably not explode. But they will wear out. Like us, they move intrepidly toward retirement. But herein lies another safety problem. According to the Worldwatch Institute, a Washington-based research organization, hundreds of nuclear power reactors will be taken out of service in the next thirty years. But, since nuclear reactors only came on line thirty years ago, no country has adequately prepared for this decommissioning. To protect public health from radiation that accumulates during nuclear plant operations,

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retired reactors must be cleaned up, dismantled, and buried, all in such a way as to keep their wastes from contaminating the soil and the water for tens of thousands of years. At present, according to Worldwatch, no country is technically prepared for this job, let alone ready to assume the staggering costs. In the last decade, the economic burden of burying low-level wastes in the U.S. has increased more than tenfold.

The prices of nuclear power are clearly multiple. To construct, maintain, and finally dismantle such plants is neither cheap nor without danger. As we have learned from Three Mile Island and Chernobyl, the possibility of operational error or design failure is real. The conclusion must be faced: the final cost of nuclear power may be seemingly endless investment and eternal vigilance. Is it worth it?

The Soviet handling of the Chernobyl meltdown forms the nucleus of the second question. It has produced a political windfall for the West. How can anyone possibly trust the Soviets? They didn't warn anyone about the fallout, not their own people nor their allies. Is this Gorbachev's new straightforwardness? We should discuss arms control with such cold dissemblers? Nyet!

What the Chernobyl disaster has made clearer than ever before, however, is that we indeed inhabit a global village. What is more, the case of 84,000 people forced to abandon their homes is nothing compared to the social disruption that would befall a metropolitan area struck by a similar nuclear catastrophe. And what if the accident involved not simply a power plant, but a weapon *designed* to be destructive?

The release of scientific information from Chernobyl has been infuriatingly slow and incomplete. But with it and our wagging finger at the Kremlin has come the realization that everywhere is Chernobyl. The Ukrainian officials' ineptness and Moscow's refusal to sound the alarm are more than the effects of a closed totalitarian regime. Although these cannot be minimized, they alone do not account for the human condition's unwillingness to expose its mistakes gracefully. When a nuclear accident occurred at Tsuruga, Japan, in 1981, it was not disclosed until radioactivity was detected six weeks later in a nearby bay. And when a fourth NASA rocket failed over New Mexico in April, it was not announced publicly until the following month. There is something of the Waldheim syndrome at work in all of us. Thus, the Department of Energy (DOE) is reluctant to hold government nuclear reactors and facilities to the same standards required for commercial plants, fearful lest such standards might force the closing of a number of DOE and Department of Defense facilities. Can we afford such a double standard in light of Chernobyl?

The most desirable effect of Chernobyl would be twofold. First, nuclear safety would be enhanced across the board and around the world. The Union of Concerned Scientists has suggested a number of worthwhile improvements in this regard for the U.S., many of which are intended to motivate the NRC to become an agency geared to the safety of the citizenry. The *Economist* recently noted that simpler and safer nuclear reactors — such as Sweden's process-inherent ultimately-safe reactor, which uses a boron-in-water solution to immerse a nuclear reactor and shut it off automatically if there is a malfunction — are now available. If the modern world's course must be a nuclear one, a question that arises again from the ashes, it must be the safest one imaginable. (The same issue of the *Economist*, March 29, reported that "the nuclear power industry remains as safe as a chocolate factory." Don't tell them that in Hershey, Pennsylvania!)

The second necessary effect of Chernobyl must be for greater candor in these matters from the Soviet government, and from all governments. The USSR has belatedly agreed to supply the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency with daily reports on radiation levels at Chernobyl, and to go to Vienna "as soon as possible" for a "post-accident analysis." The world must know exactly what happened at Chernobyl. There is some reason to believe eventually it will. The Russians cannot stonewall a united world opinion. And the hope is they will be forced to make concessions in other vital areas to recoup their devastating loss of face. Already they have stated that they have no plans at this time to resume nuclear weapons testing, and have reiterated their openness to on-site inspection and the installation of seismic devices for verification of a testing agreement (*New York Times*, May 9).

At the recent Tokyo summit, the seven industrial democracies likewise urged the early elaboration of an international convention committing all parties to report and exchange information in the event of nuclear emergencies or accidents. Five days before Chernobyl there was another small hint of progress. The Soviet Union and forty-two other countries met in Geneva to establish guidelines on liability for nuclear-powered satellites that fall to earth.

Yet while these two areas under consideration may provide some eventual, nonvolatile silver lining to the cloud of Chernobyl, a third question remains to unsettle our consciousness. It was a Ukrainian official, assisting in the relocation of the 84,000, who voiced it, one Ivan Plyushch of Kopelovo: "If this has all happened in peacetime," he said, "can you imagine what it would be like in war?" And this did not even include mention of the cancer complications his people and countless others may learn of in ten to forty years. What then? We can scarcely imagine the depth of lamentation. But perhaps we have a presentment in Rabbi Nahum, and in a poem Pasternak wrote thirty years ago, "When the Skies Clear":

I'll hear your long Mass all my years
For there's a trembling in my soul. . . .

THE MISSING BURKE

There is a persistent rumor that conservatives are people who fear the centralization of state power; that they look with sympathy on institutions which have grown up piecemeal over a long time; and that they favor political checks and balances even when (or especially when) these might inhibit the impulses of more direct democracy.

There is an equally persistent but, alas, much cruder rumor that conservatives have no principled position about power at

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all, but simply like it concentrated or dispersed depending on whatever most serves business interests.

Which rumor, we wonder, should gain in credence from a little noted but potentially very important aspect of the controversy surrounding the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Act?

Last February, a federal court ruled unconstitutional one part of the mechanism set up for automatic budget-cutting by Gramm-Rudman. The court's argument was that the law required the comptroller general to perform an executive function when that official was not part of the executive branch, i.e., cannot be dismissed by the president. (The comptroller general, who heads the legislative branch's General Accounting Office, is appointed by the president but can only be removed by Congress.) The decision is now in the hands of the Supreme Court which may even have overruled it, in part or entirely, before you read this.

What made this federal court argument so potentially important, however, is that the same argument could be used to rule unconstitutional *all* the independent federal agencies. That means the Federal Reserve Board, the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Federal Trade Commission, and a dozen others. Either these agencies would have to give up most of their current functions and power, or the president would have to be given the right to appoint or dismiss their top officials at his pleasure.

Now these agencies are hardly new: the Interstate Commerce Commission was established in 1887. They have grown to constitute what has often been called a fourth branch of government. Up until now presidents could decisively steer the independent agencies' policies through new appointments only when the terms of sitting officials expired, and this institutional restraint has proved frustrating to conservative and liberal administrations alike. Critics in and out of government have accused the agencies of serving their own bureaucratic interests or, in many cases, the interests of the industries they were meant to regulate. Still, it is hard to believe that all the functions performed by these agencies in regulating a highly interdependent economy are going to be assumed by the invisible hand of the market. So do we really want to turn these powers lock, stock, and barrel over to the presidency?

Well, we don't really know. Over the years, there have been good arguments for having the term of the chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, for instance, run concurrently with that of the president, so that a new administration could pursue a coordinated economic policy. And there have been good arguments against. But the thought, as *Business Week* (March 3) expressed it, of a new president putting away his tuxedo (or her ball gown?) the day after inauguration and promptly firing the heads of the SEC, the FRB, the FCC, the NLRB, the FTC, the FEC, etc., etc. — well, it does give us pause.

What gives us more pause is why conservatives didn't mull this one over a bit more, rather than reacting to the federal court decision with glee. Present and former members of the Reagan administration eagerly anticipated what Christopher M. DeMuth, once of the Office of Management and Budget, called "the process of folding the agencies into the executive." They could appeal, of course, to pure democratic principle, or to the constitutional framework of a neatly defined three branches that excludes a hybrid "fourth branch." But one would have expected a little more hesitancy about hewing to strictly "rational" principles of government unqualified by the peculiar adjustments of experience, or at least more hesitancy about increasing the powers of the presidency.

Funny, how in a pinch Edmund Burke always seems to give way to Adam Smith — or even to Napoleon Bonaparte.

ETC.

● Maybe it won't solve illiteracy, but Pizza Hut's "Book it? National Reading Incentive Program" could develop into more than a slick publicity stunt. For a corporate investment of $50 million [presumably a tax writeoff], over 7 million children, grades 1-6, received free pizza, buttons, and other incentives for reading above and beyond their normal school assignments in 1985-86. But, given that the school lunch program is in jeopardy and illiteracy grows alarmingly among some groups more than others, isn't the real issue: how to motivate those children who need both the pizza and the incentive to read? Perhaps next year, Pizza Hut could hold the buttons and add pepperoni. And teachers in low-income school districts should call Pizza Hut on behalf of students who complete their reading homework and ask pointedly: "Do you deliver?"

U.S.-Canadian trade

FORGOTTEN PARTNER

DOUBTS NORTH OF THE BORDER

FREE TRADE has long been a controversial topic in Canadian politics. There is a real sense in which Canada owes its very existence to the will not to be absorbed by the United States. Yet even with Canada's British connection, trade with the United States has been more important than trade with the mother country. A Canadian today may well drive a car that is made in Philadelphia, with an engine block from Brazil and a cylinder head from Mexico, an alternator from Germany, and tires from France. He eats tomatoes from Mexico and lettuce from California, wears shoes from Rumania, a shirt from Indonesia, and relaxes with music from a Japanese stereo. And yet Canada is in fact the United States' biggest trading partner, and as such is taken so much for granted that a recent U.S. president referred to Japan in that capacity.

Why then should the question of free trade be raised now? Perhaps the first reason lies in a resurgence of protectionist sentiments in the United States. This in turn reflects concern

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over a temporary trade advantage on the part of Canada due to the strength — some would say over-valuing — of the United States dollar as high interest rates attract foreign funds to fill a gap left by unprecedented deficit spending.

Aside from the usual dogmatic assertions of the wisdom of free trade coming out of Economics 101 texts, lines in the Canadian debate are fairly clear. Economic nationalists and trade unionists are openly hostile, as are most political leaders in the province of Ontario, which with Quebec has the heaviest concentration of manufacturing in Canada. Business lobbies, the Canadian Association of Manufacturers, the Chamber of Commerce, and Western political elites are overwhelmingly in favor of free trade with the United States.

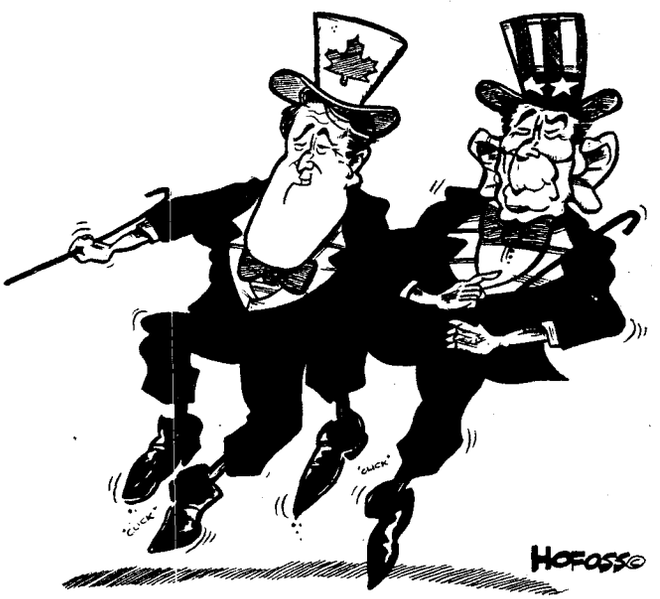
Nevertheless, the debate on both sides of the border does not appear to be clearly defined. As one might expect, each country looks to defend its own interests. After intense lobbying by President Reagan, for example, the Senate Finance Committee (by a vote of ten to ten), failed on April 23 to block authorizing the president to employ "fast-track" negotiations with Canada on this matter. The administration is now free to pursue its negotiations while Congress can only approve or reject the final agreement. Still, observers on both sides of the border believe unofficial concessions will yet have to be made to U.S. interests, the lumber, pork, and brewing lobbies in particular. Earlier, the United States had declared that "everything is on the table." This, translated, meant that the United States government takes a very dim view of any attempts on the part of the Canadian government to impede the sale of Canada to U.S. interests, all together or a piece at a time.

It has been estimated that between 60 and 70 percent of Canadian manufacturing is already under U.S. ownership. The Liberal government, under the leadership of Pierre Eliott Trudeau, had introduced a legislated bureaucracy, the Foreign Investment Review Agency. It was greeted south of the border with varying degrees of outrage, although in practice permission for American or other transnationals to invest in Canada — that is to buy out Canadian concerns — was seldom denied. Legislation promoting Canadian ownership of the petroleum industry was also greeted with howls of rage in Alberta (which many Eastern Canadians regard as a colony of Texas), and in the more dogmatic echelons of the Conservative party. Yet even the ruling Conservatives have shown some concern for the takeover of Canadian publishers by American transnationals, as cultural nationalists hasten to point out that there is a definite difference in the kind of books published by Canadian publishers and those published by branches of American publishing firms.

One serious difficulty complicates the question considerably. In a real sense, Canada has a different economic system, and different social systems. Arguing in favor of the imposition of countervailing duties on Canadian groundfish imports, the U.S. fishing industry, for example, cited literally dozens of Canadian programs, some specific (such as unemployment insurance and Canada's universal health and medical insurance programs). Concerning the latter, an American living in Halifax, Edgar Z. Friedenberg, once remarked that in Nova Scotia the poor are taxed to provide health care for the rich, just as in the United States. But in Nova Scotia the poor get it, too. Nova Scotia fishermen pay for their health care through a 10 percent sales tax and their federal income tax contributions. Canada's unemployment insurance program may appear generous to Americans. It can certainly last longer — up to fifty-one weeks — than most U.S. programs. In imposing countervailing duties, the U.S. government apparently did not accept the argument that Canada's health care and unemployment insurance constitute an unfair subsidy, but the fact that these were alleged to constitute subsidies is disquieting to many Canadians.

At the same time, this could be encouraging for other Canadians. Canada's unemployment insurance program has long been under attack from the right and from business interests. Some Canadians fear that the real thrust for free trade on the Canadian right is the hope of an integrated labor market and the chance to import sunbelt wages to Canada. For these, a free-trade agreement that eliminated or cut back any Canadian social programs under the rubric of eliminating "unfair subsidies" would be manna from heaven, although the Mulroney government steadfastly maintains that such programs are not open to question. On the other hand, the former U.S. ambassador, Mr. Paul Robinson, had repeatedly criticized Canada for spending too much on social programs and not enough on weapons. The present ambassador, Mr. Thomas Niles, a career diplomat who appears to know better than to attack such established programs, has noted, apropos of free trade, that *everything* is on the table. For the ambassador, it does not appear that *everything* includes Canada's social programs. It is more likely that he is referring to Canadian efforts to maintain control over such culturally sensitive areas as films, broadcasting, and publishing. Nevertheless, in the face of Mr. Reagan's savage attack on similar programs in the United States, some Canadians are worried.

Trade unionists are worried about jobs, although advocates



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of freer trade maintain that free trade will — in the long term — increase employment in Canada. It is difficult to predict what effect full integration into the U.S. market would have on Canada. Already something between 60 and 70 percent of Canadian-U.S. trade is simply not subject to *market* pricing, but to *transfer pricing*, that is, transnational corporations buying and selling to themselves across the border. Here, one assumes, prices are set to maximize profits while taking into account such things as tariffs and taxes in each country. How much of this industry would survive in a regime of free trade? No one really knows. It is easy enough to say that if tariff barriers were removed, branch plants in Canada would be moved, or that Canadian industries would move south from Ontario and Quebec.

Some special problems already exist. American multinationals in the pharmaceutical industry have been pushing hard to change Canadian legislation that had limited the period of protection for drug patents, thus opening them to the generic drug market, saving millions of dollars for consumers and lowering profits for the industry. The Canadian government had already promised action in favor of the companies, but it has been slowed under intense pressure from consumer groups. Beer is another problem area. American brewers simply do not have access to Canadian markets, particularly in Ontario where beer is sold exclusively in outlets controlled by Canadian brewers. It should be noted that there is considerably less than "free trade" in beer within Canada itself. Draft beer in barrels cannot legally be transported across provincial boundaries, and bottled beer is, in most provinces, a state monopoly. Every Canadian province maintains a tight monopoly on the sale of wine and spirits, and prices are often double the retail price in the United States. Even in Quebec, where beer and wine can be sold in corner grocery stores, the prices appear to be set by the Quebec liquor monopoly, unless the absolute uniformity of prices be due to the fact that perfect competition has resulted in equilibrium. Whatever the case, few Canadians could imagine that any provincial government in Canada would abandon its legally established monopoly in this area.

Another sensitive area is that of the mass media. Canada already ranks fairly high in the amount of imported television programming: 34 percent. (The United States has 1 percent; the USSR 18 percent; Ecuador 66 percent.) Most of Canada's population lives within a few hundred miles of the Canada-U.S. border, and millions of Canadians can watch U.S. television. But advertising on U.S. television stations is not a tax-deductible expense under Canadian law, a "breach of free trade" that has been a sore point for years. Canada not only has a governmentally-supported radio and television network, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, but directly subsidizes the arts and artists to an extent unheard of in the United States. Nowadays, anything to do with Canadian culture, with the Canadian identity, is sensitive. Like the United States, Canada does not have the kind of cultural traditions and cultural identity that, for example, the nations of the Common Market have. Quebec's roots are deeper, but most Canadians, and most Canadian governments, want some kind of control over such culturally sensitive areas as television, cinema, the performing arts, book and magazine publishing. Canadians are apparently willing to be taxed to support such things, and there are constant debates over Canadian culture and the Canadian identity. This is especially the case in English Canada, and may be more critical because the differences between the culture of English Canada and the mainstream of U.S. culture are both subtle and in flux. Against this background, statements to the effect that "*everything* is on the table" evoke strong and quite negative reactions. Are Canada's traditional and established ways of approaching these questions to be sacrificed to the voracious appetites of American multinational corporations? To be written off as "unfair competition" in a free-trade agreement?

For the ruling Tory party and for many in the business community, free trade is seen as a question of survival. But at what price? The question is particularly difficult now with a government — and an ideology — in power in Washington that obviously regards many established and traditional Canadian institutions as both "unfair" and "socialistic."

JORDAN BISHOP

(Jordan Bishop is a member of the faculty of the College of Cape Breton in Nova Scotia.)

Of several minds: *John Garvey*

INSTRUCTION & ILLUSION

WHAT FREEDOM TOLERATES

DEALING recently with some frustrations which the nature of my work forced on me, I found myself using the language the culture has given us to deal with these things: Do I find my work satisfying? Does it mean anything to me? Is it in any way fulfilling? In the mood I was in, the answer to all of the above was a definite "no." But the questions made me consider the ways we think about meaning and satisfaction, and the ways we apply a concern about those things to work, friendship, marriage, and our relationship to God, or our lack of one.

The attempt to find meaning in work or personal relationships is understandable, and is certainly preferable to meaninglessness. We often assume, in practice, a relation between finding something full of meaning and finding it satisfying, as if the two were equivalent. What does the use of the language of meaningfulness and satisfaction, applied to so many basic human things, say about us? Does it mean that there is an ingredient which can be separated from everything else, which can be found in work,

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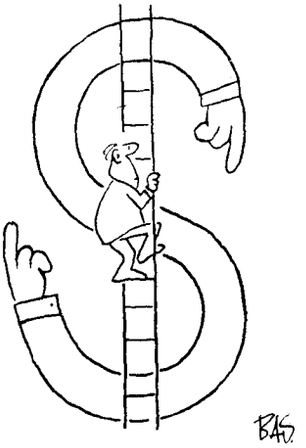
friendship, marriage, social or moral commitment, that I can pull away from every other aspect and say, "This is what pleases me; this is what means the most"? Is the worth of work or of a friendship to be found in pursuing these feelings of satisfaction and obvious meaning?

The point of the question is that satisfaction, as a goal, is inherently frustrating. The frustration is built into our flesh and the fact of our mortality. Satisfaction, pleasure, and happiness are limited and wonderful. We want to stay with the wonder and pleasure and avoid the fact that these have borders beyond which there is something else, and the something else is what our culture will avoid at all costs, because of what it confronts us with. Pain and disappointment are unavoidable, and real self-sacrifice (not the parody of it which is a left-handed satisfaction, the enjoyment of a role which comes down to a sick preening — "see how self-sacrificing I am") is part of any marriage or friendship which goes through a rough passage. In the end all of us will have to face the death of people we love, or, worse, watch them endure forms of suffering which we will either accept as real and part of the world we must inhabit, or deny in one way or another.

There is something in our political and economic understanding which is based on one version or another of the satisfaction of our desires. This is the dark side of capitalism: if people are to sell us what they want to sell us, they will be tempted — and in a free society will be allowed — to try to convince us that what we can be persuaded to desire, we really require; and in a society with a cultural atmosphere as determined as ours is by commerce and advertising, this can appear as a general reality rather than a cultural condition. A fog made up of yearnings, generated from a number of places, for reasons of self-interest, stands in for reality.

The bright side of capitalism is that it allows a measure of freedom from state control and assumes that in at least the entrepreneurial area of life, the state has no clear rights of domination. State control has not been one of the brightest facets of the twentieth century at either the fascist or Communist end of the spectrum. But so much of the freedom capitalism allows is permitted for all the wrong reasons. Furthermore, there is a funny assumption on the part of capitalist ideologists that capitalism somehow gives birth to freedom all by itself, as if the right to push capital back and forth from person to person were essentially different from the trades involved in any other form of force, power, or influence. It can be said that in a libertarian society the right to engage in forms of trade is not coercively limited, and that this is an improvement of a mild sort on places where such a right is limited, but the notion that other freedoms automatically follow is given the lie by the reality of life in Singapore or Taiwan.

IT IS easy to see where this prejudice, linking capitalism to the idea of freedom, comes from. Nineteenth-century European liberalism had some assumptions in common with present-day conservative theory; it was an exciting time and boasted an exciting group of thinkers. Nineteenth-century liberalism really believed in liberty, a word heard as little today — except for rhetorical reasons — from conservatives as from liberals, because conservatives fear that it might apply to someone who wants to start a communitarian and possibly left-wing grade school, and liberals fear that it might apply to someone who wants the right to teach grade school kids the obviously goofy notion that evolution is a left-wing plot. I don't think I'm stretching things when I say that it is very difficult to see a Lord Acton supporting the Reagan administration's caution on South Africa's evil, or its equivocation on any other denial of liberty.



It should be said that the glory of a free society is that it can tolerate even capitalism, rather than that it is a glory of capitalism that it tolerates, even creates, freedom — a demonstrably false claim.

In any case, our questions are formed by cultural assumptions. They are formed that way, right or left, without any appeal or alternative possibilities where those assumptions are not challenged. Those assumptions are not challenged from either the left or the right in any serious way by the fog of our culture's received assumptions, which seem like reality. We cannot help believing that happiness lies in the satisfaction of individual desire, or that the end of our lives should be the pursuit of such happiness. We are likely to think of our religious lives in terms which reflect the culture, rather than allowing religion to be in a helpful way countercultural.

One part of the vocation of people who adhere to a traditional religion is to offer an alternative view, one formed over millennia, of what it means to be human and what ought to matter to us. It is true that a view of humanity formed in the fourth century is not, just by virtue of its being ancient, superior to our own. But by virtue of its being an alternative view, it has at least the humbling effect of reminding us of the limitation of our own culture's set of assumptions, assumptions which, without challenge, become the whole of reality for us and allow us to live in illusion.

Perhaps that is what bothers a lot of people about trendy religion, or the attempt to bring ancient traditions up to date. Maybe Saint Basil or Saint Francis can't tell my children everything they need to know to live in the modern world, but they can tell them a hell of a lot more than John Denver. It isn't just the fact that so many new hymns are tacky, though they are, or that updated liturgy is boring, though it usually is, or that gimmicks are distracting and irritating, not to speak of condescending. . . . It could be that people sense they are losing an important part of what it means to be instructed, and in the process are losing a defense against illusion. JOHN GARVEY

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A genius for passion & purity

WILLIAM DUNLEA

THE DEATH OF François Mauriac in 1970, at the age of eighty-four, indeed marked the "end of an era." Few would dispute the fact that he was the last of the giants of the French Catholic literary revival that included Bloy, Claudel, Péguy, and Bernanos. He was also a national monument heaped with enough honors — an immortal of the Académie before he was fifty, a Nobel laureate before he was seventy — to bury a less sturdy recipient. He preached the ephemerality of worldly renown but managed to endure it to the end. At one hundred he shows no sign of sagging under his laurels: since his death, scarcely a year has passed that he has not been the subject of at least one major critical or biographical study in France, and he remains a going concern elsewhere in Western Europe and in England. Unfortunately, America has not yet discovered Mauriac, despite the fact that translations of all his novels appeared here during the 1950s (those very translations may be a large part of the problem). If there had been hope that on the occasion of his centenary, 1985, we would witness a sudden surge of interest in his work, that hope has now faded.

If Malraux, Sartre, Camus, Beauvoir, and Beckett all have their trusty workhorses in Academia, USA, why has Mauriac still not found his Justin O'Brien? Is it assumed that "Catholic writers" should interest only "Catholic critics" and "Catholic readers"? If so, be it known that François Mauriac, the least academic of académiciens, was also the least official of Catholics. Although in strictest literary terms Mauriac was a master, and none of his above-named younger contemporaries were (or are), one thing his work and theirs have in common is a consciously conceived and clearly articulated world view. Yet unlike them, Mauriac, while sharing the anguish of his time, transcended its despair; his insight into the human condition is more vital, less abstract than theirs. He drew entirely on the bourgeois provincial background of his childhood and youth in building his imaginary world, while Malraux, Sartre, and Camus transcribed a more "objective" world. Still, Mauriac universalized his creation in a more humanly relevant way. Indeed it is generally agreed that as a regional writer Mauriac is unsurpassed. Nor has he lacked for admirers among his American colleagues, viz., his honorary membership in the American Academy of Arts & Letters. What he needs before he gets much older is more American readers and more students from among whom may emerge future American Mauriac specialists. He deserves nothing less.

Poet, novelist, playwright, essayist, memoirist, biographer, polemicist (in which latter capacity he played a key role in De Gaulle's return to power) — Mauriac was before all else a man of letters. At his death, his published *Oeuvres complètes* comprised eighteen thick volumes. He may not have been a great poet or dramatist, or a super-great novelist, but he helped to shape the consciousness and sensibility of his time as only a great writer can. While his novels are still rightly regarded as the core of his achievement, they have too long overshadowed his much larger nonfictional output. Mauriac was one of those rare writers who on nearly every page of every work has something important to say. As with all great men of letters, the whole of his work is remarkable for its unity of theme and expression: one encounters the same intimate vision and voice in whatever form he writes. If the sensibility is always romantic and the style always classic, they are not contradictory but complementary.

With *A Kiss for the Leper* (1922) Mauriac firmly established himself as a novelist of major significance: in this work "the Mauriac novel" crystallized. Here for the first time all of its elements were combined with telling effect: the hypnotic lyricism with which he evokes the pine forests, vineyards, and scorching sands of his native Bordeaux countryside is matched by the poignancy with which he reveals the inner essence of his characters; both come redolently and vibrantly to life. Here the interaction of the natural world with human character is felt more subtly yet more forcefully than in his earlier fiction. A tale stripped to its barest essentials, a humble yet many-sided tragedy, stark in its pathos yet seething with passion below the

WILLIAM DUNLEA *is a former contributor to* Commonweal. *A specialist in modern French literature, he recently completed a biographical study of Mauriac, and has published articles in* Accent, Poetry, *and* Hudson Review.

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surface, told with no less subtlety than simplicity — these will now be the hallmarks of the Mauriac novel. In further shaping and expanding his fictional world, Mauriac's unique mastery will — with few lapses during the subsequent decade, his most creative period — continue to grow with it, producing such powerful and moving studies of the troubled human heart as *Génitrix, The Desert of Love, Thérèse Desqueyroux, The Viper's Knot,* works assuring him a place just to the right of Proust among French novelists of this century.

In the modern novel, as in the modern perception, passion is divorced from the realm of moral choice to which it was preordained in classic literature and drama, wherein it was basically conceived as lust. The words "passion" and "lust" now sound archaic, if not downright grandiloquent: they not only have too classic, but too biblical, a resonance. "Passion" engages the whole person but "sex" — as Freud, Lawrence, Hemingway, and their myriad epigoni see it — *is* the whole person. Sex can be sublimated, but passion must be transformed. What Mauriac, the only major exponent of classic tragedy among twentieth-century novelists, defines morally and treats imaginatively as temptation and sin, most of his contemporaries (and ours) define and treat as psychobiological impulse and response, warning us of the terrible things that happen when we repress them. In this century Mauriac is almost alone in creating characters in whom body and soul are so inseparable that the one can do nothing without totally involving the other; consequently, repression doesn't work either way. The tension characteristic of Mauriac's novels is a projection of his own inner conflict, which was dictated by the stringent moral code in which he was reared and to which he sought to adhere freely. It is the transmutation of this personal struggle which gives Mauriac's art an intensity unique in twentieth-century fiction. Haunted by a sense of sin, the Mauriacian lover displays the ardor so lacking in the typical fictional lover of our liberated day who does everything on reflex, as in a laboratory demonstration.

Mauriac's realistic portrayal of passion, despite its Christian dimension, was certain to arouse controversy in orthodox Catholic circles. *Thérèse Desqueyroux* (1926) provoked a scandal, and with *Destins* the following year, Mauriac's position as foremost French "Catholic" novelist became virtually untenable. In this novel his coreligionists did not find, as they did with so much of his previous fiction, that flesh triumphed over spirit, but rather that a kind of blasphemous despair triumphed over both. Their cries of outrage helped bring on Mauriac's famous *crise de conscience* of the late twenties, which brought him to the realization that he could no longer subordinate his Catholicism to his creativity, which is what always seemed to happen when he tried to keep them in separate compartments. He decided that he would have to make them coexist on equal terms since the only alternative appeared to be chronic crisis. This has somewhat facetiously been called Mauriac's "conversion," a term which misrepresents Mauriac's resolution of the conflict — between his sense of moral responsibility as a writer and his commitment to his artistic autonomy — by implying that he was converted to the kind of insipidly pious fiction he had always abhorred. In fact, he now sought to leaven with a broader humanity the harshness of his pessimism about sinful human nature.

It is true that as Mauriac's creative *élan* became more subdued, his work tended to lose its sharp focus, and with it much of its power. Even so, he never stooped to edify. The greatest art, music, and poetry are edifying in the highest sense, yet the novel, being the least ennobling of literary genres, has never proven congenial to that type of exaltation even when it assumes an epic character. When the novel attempts to edify in a sentimental vein it tends to betray its *raison d'être* by falsifying human truth, which to Mauriac was the worst sin a novelist could commit. He thus faced a formidable challenge when he undertook to "purify" his creative wellspring, and the strain — as opposed to the unifying tension of his great narratives of the twenties — became increasingly evident after *The Viper's Knot* (1932).

Since Mauriac's sinners are almost invariably a far cry from the norm, it is intriguing to note that his most "far-out" reprobate, Thérèse Desqueyroux — irretrievable more in the labyrinthine complexity of her motivation than in her sinfulness — should have been the one to completely capture the imagination of the general public. Through this unheroic heroine of his most widely read and admired novel, Mauriac makes his most mordant comment on the "ordinary" sinners who stand in judgment of her more "original" kind. Through the paranoid and miserly Louis of *Viper's Knot,* that other Mauriac novel of "mass" appeal (in Europe if not America), Mauriac skewers the ethical and social values of the same moral and amoral majorities still more relentlessly. It cannot be doubted that many real-life prototypes of these majorities have been among the most avid readers of these searching spiritual dramas — a clear indication that the author has touched on a subterranean sense of sin that survives beneath the meticulously wrought façades of propriety and rectitude, on the one hand, and of moral indifference and cynicism, on the other, that transcends all boundaries of class, all categories of vice.

IN THE Mauriac novel, character is conveyed through states of soul more often than through action: the atmosphere is more dramatic than the action because the drama is interior. The depth of that drama, and the decisive implication therein of nature underlies the evocative power of the narrative. Although Mauriac is not the first novelist to employ the art of suggestion, no other has thereby rendered character quite so incisively and dramatically. He assimilated a vast spectrum of literary influences — from Racine to Chateaubriand to Balzac and on through Barrès, Bourget, and Gide — out of which he created a narrative technique as remarkable as that of Dostoyevsky (to whom he was close in spirit but distant in art) for its lyrical precision as for its dramatic extravagance. Mauriac was a poet and dramatist who found his most original and powerful expression in this narrative style. He did not create on a giant scale like Balzac, Flaubert, and Tolstoy, but like them he redefined the novel by making it more pliable to his

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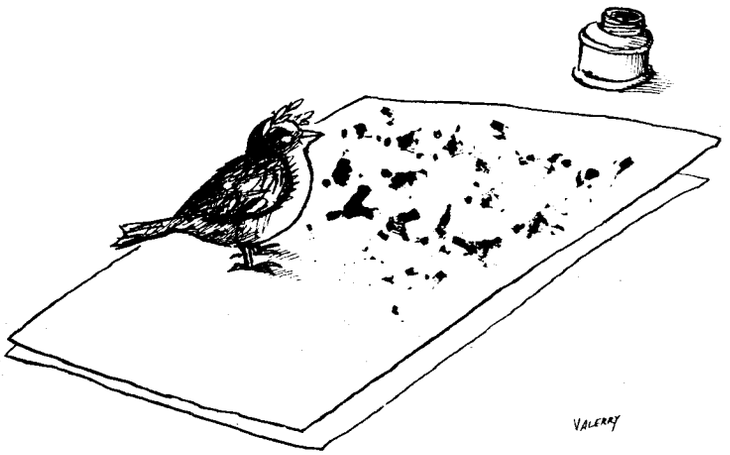
aims. Moreover, poet and novelist are seldom in discord in Mauriac, as they so often are in Melville and Hardy. The originality of his lyric prose resides in a poignant synthesis of physical and metaphysical elements through which he creates a compact universe of sensuous immediacy, a world small in geophysical terms but of immense scope spiritually. Without presumption he set forth his novelistic perspective as being that of "a metaphysician who works in the concrete," who incarnates "that sinner of whom the theologians give us an abstract idea."

One fundamental reason for the concreteness of Mauriac's metaphysic is that it is Pascalian. The moral and psychological ambivalence of humanity, which it was Pascal's genius to explore more exhaustively and reveal more eloquently than any writer before him, Mauriac demonstrates more convincingly than any writer since, with the arguable exception of Baudelaire. By the same token, Mauriac's realism is tragic because it is Racinian. Mauriac's two great masters meet in his portrayal of the passions. With them he believed that the soul is saved or damned through the flesh. Mauriac, who discussed his work candidly, stressed his compulsion to set his dramas in the torrid sun of the Landes where temptation has singularly easy access to his protagonists. Humanity, as Mauriac paints it, is forever torn between the Creator and other creatures; among the human species "exist only sinners and those who have been purified of sin." It may seem that by recording its every inflection and nuance Mauriac's emphasis on "misère" is inordinate, yet Mauriac reminds us that in our knowledge of human "misère" is the beginning of human "grandeur."

As novelist, Mauriac embarked on a dark quest unaided by the sanguine assurance of redemption enjoyed by conventional Catholic piety. Still less did he share the liberal humanist's optimism about the innate goodness of the person. He also had a decisive lead over the nihilists who seek to proselytize their despair; the radical pessimism of an advocate of radical purity was rooted in a secure faith. Unlike Malraux or Celine, Mauriac was not resigned to journeying from night to night when he set out. Early failed attempts to portray the deliberate quest for sanctity convinced him that he had no particular gift in that direction, though he was himself increasingly engaged in that very struggle; it was, therefore, hardly a question of "show me a saint and I'll paint one." Like Dostoyevsky, he scorned as illusory the gelatinous middle ground between sanctity and iniquity. Mauriac believed that tepid sinners make weak potential candidates for sanctity.



With all the concreteness of his vision, Mauriac seldom fails to preserve the mystery of his characters. His creatures are as complex as Dostoyevsky's, his lovers as tormented as Strindberg's, but without the hysteria of either. Indeed, it is their mystery that makes them most memorable. For as Graham Greene observed, one may easily forget the machinations in which Mauriac's characters are caught up, but one rarely forgets the characters themselves. (When once prodded to compare his own work with Mauriac's, Greene quipped: "Wouldn't that be rather like comparing chalk with cheese?")

Mauriac's most typical sinner-protagonists are larger than life in the insatiability of their desire, their obsessive hunger for a love that no other person can satisfy, and in the consequent depth and persistence of their self-torment. Their every effort to escape the prison of their longing seems to enclose them more helplessly in it. Only rarely do they sense that they are running away from love rather than toward it. Portraying human love in all its aspects, Mauriac suggests their interrelatedness: for him all love is one, in that through it we seek to fill the void Augustine says God created in us that He alone can fill. Few of us are not at some point conscious of this void, yet most of us determine to fill it with what we think should belong there, which results in our feeling the emptiness more acutely. The most common confusion occurs in the belief that sexual compatibility alone can nurture or take the place of deep, abiding love. On the contrary, says Mauriac, lovers know each other only through the pain they inflict on each other and thereby on themselves. For him the only undying human love is that which is subsumed by Divine love; death is writ large on human love as an end in itself. "One dare not scrutinize the face of the beloved lest one see there the slow inexorable approach of death." Remembering an old mistress, Louis soliloquizes: "What remains of a body interred for thirty years? To believe in bodily resurrection perhaps it is necessary to have vanquished one's flesh. The punishment of those who have abused the flesh is to no longer be able to imagine that it could be raised up again." Mauriac's own dying words were: "We do not know what we desire."

Clearly the moralist in Mauriac is always present in his art, though seldom obtrusively. Proust went further than any previous novelist in depicting the vanity of human desire and the futility of human passion, but he left their victims at a metaphysical dead end; Mauriac leads them back to the Augustinian void (by way of Pascal), which can be their damnation or salvation, and which no other novelist has probed as consciously or copiously. In doing so, he is as disturbing to those who would live comfortably with God as to those who would live comfortably without God. Mauriac's fixation on corporeal purity did not prevent him from perceiving a link between sexual repression and cupidity in his own family background, and its analogous links with the quest of power and prestige in the world of professional ambition and public life (as well as with a passion for spiritual domination of others in the reli-

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gious life). He therefore believes that "purity" must be an integral virtue not restricted to sexual morality.

Mauraic seemed to feel that as a novelist he was just as compelled to portray sin as his sinners were to commit it. He did not attempt to explain this compulsion beyond the oft-quoted "confession" that try as he will to purify his creative stream, his characters stubbornly adhere to the "scum" at the bottom, *"où plongent les secrètes racines de mon oeuvre"*; for even when he is in a state of grace, they emerge *"du plus trouble de moi-même; ils se forment de ce qui subsiste en moi malgré moi."* In other words, they rise out of the most troubled depths of what Mauraic conceives to be his own unappeased and unredeemed sinful nature. He offers no justification for thus troubling his readers, and only one for his fictional offspring: if they did not love or crave love, they would not sin. Yet oftener than not Mauriac meets the demands of moral realism, which are sufficient justification for any depiction of passion that does not merely pander to the lewd imagination. Charles Du Bos perceptively pointed out that the *"élément trouble"* is indissociable from the most original, poetic, and moving qualities of his stories — qualities which spring not from a muddy source but from an *"amalgame de sensations"* achieved through a singular gift for making sensible the insensible and perceptible the imperceptible (rarely done justice in English translation). The very quintessence of Mauriac's art could be summed up as emotion recollected with urgency.

For Mauriac the unpardonable sin is to be unloving, yet even his most heartless characters themselves seek to be loved, or seek something that will pass for love, by whatever devious devices they must employ. On the other hand, his most loving characters may also confuse the act of loving with the desire to be loved; they do not give themselves so much as seek to be taken. While Mauriac has powerfully portrayed the kind of possessive (usually maternal) love that would devour its object, his more typical portrayal is not of the passion for impossible possession but for impossible submission. The latter passion generally turns out to be the more implacable and unquenchable, doomed to stray even further in the desert of erotic love from its true source and object; and doomed, needless to say, never to be requited, since, all too often in the Mauriacian scheme, the loved one bitterly resents having to "belong" to the loving one. Belonging and possessing, like loving and hating, finally become blurred. In Mauriac's novels, the only love that is not selfish, self-deceived, or ultimately self-destructive is self-sacrificing love, which finds fulfillment in a self-transcending idealism, the sublime passion of renunciation.

Although for Mauriac all love, however degraded and perverted, has a pure source in childhood innocence, he never ceased to mourn the brief duration of even the purest child's innocence. "Our destiny, once we begin to isolate it, is like those plants we can never dig up with all their roots intact . . . Even our childhood is in a sense an end, a completion." So he writes in *Thérèse Desqueyroux,* tracing the criminal tendencies of his heroine back to her early life. To Mauriac the quest for sanctity represents a quest for the lost innocence of love. His love-tormented sinners are actually, if unwittingly, engaged in this very quest; but without faith, which can only come through the intervention of grace, the quest is illusory. Since the loss of innocence is irrevocable, only through the transcendence of self is it possible to break out of the circle of self-deception, frustration, and despair.

'SUGAR ISLAND' OF THE PHILIPPINES

A bittersweet world

LUCY KOMISAR

BACOLOD CITY, Negros, the Philippines. The victory of a new popular national government has not ended the guerrilla mobilization on the sugar island of Negros. New Peoples Army (NPA) leaders say they will not lay down their arms until there is a substantial change in the situation of the rural poor. Negros sugar workers are probably the most impoverished in the country — malnutrition borders on starvation here — and their efforts to improve their conditions have met with severe repression.

Visits to the sugar plantations offer graphic witness to people's suffering. I met Efren Villanueva, thirty-three. He sat on the floor of his wood and thatch hut in a village not far from Bacolod City, the provincial capital. A sheet of plastic hung under the flimsy roof to keep out the rain. Straw sleeping mats were stacked in a corner. "Three children died in this house," he said, "two of diarrhea, the other of measles; there are three left. The small children here find anything to eat to fill their stomachs; they can't be watched. That is the cause of the diarrhea." (UNICEF reports there are 145,000 children on the

LUCY KOMISAR *is a foreign correspondent who has covered the recent political events in the Philippines.*

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island suffering from malnourishment and often from anemia and pulmonary tuberculosis as well. Catholic church and private feeding programs have been started for children in stages of severe malnutrition, but they reach only a fraction. In the town of Kabankalan, 50 percent of the funerals are for children.)

Now Villanueva has another problem; he is among some seventy workers laid off from their jobs as laborers on the Hacienda Guinsang sugar plantation. (About forty-five still have jobs.) Since late November, the workers, members of the National Federation of Sugar Workers (NFSW), have been on strike, picketing to prevent the entrance of strikebreakers. They get food, clothing, and medicine from the union and the Roman Catholic diocese.

Eduardo Claparols, seventy, manages the plantation which is owned by his wife and other relatives. He says the workers were "terminated for retrenchment." "We're an industry in distress," he says. "I can't give them the work."

It is true that the world sugar market has plummeted, from a high of sixty cents a pound in the 1970s to a fluctuating four to eight cents today, less than the production cost. Many planters are in debt to the banks.

Claparols, a portly man with gray hair and aviator glasses, wore blue and white checked bermuda shorts and blue rubber thongs. He sat on a couch in a living room whose glass doors overlooked a backyard swimming pool surrounded by plants. He said he had done a lot for his workers. "When they were built thirty years ago, those little houses were just right," he said. He had built public toilets, bathhouses, and wells which had been ruined by the workers. He said he had given them land to grow food and "spent thousands buying seedlings." And he said he paid his workers the minimum wage of $1.50 a day. But, he said, "These men eased themselves out of their work because of their behavior, their anti-social attitude to their work."

The workers replied that Claparols had hired contract laborers to do their jobs in order to break the union. They questioned his claims of generosity. (He failed to repair their houses, they said, and I noted the bamboo floor of Villanueva's shack, shattered and dangerous to walk on. Furthermore, Marcial Rosaria, thirty-three, the union finance officer, said Claparols had given them only two hectares of land for 200 people, when one hectare — 2.47 acres — was needed to feed a family of seven.) Even when they were working, they said, they had gotten less than the legal minimum. NFSW representative Nita Cherniguin said fewer than 20 percent of landlords pay the minimum wage of $1.50 a day. "The average earnings are seventy-five cents to a dollar a day," she said. "The loophole is that they give work on a piece-work basis." Calculated on piece work, their pay had yielded only seventy-three cents a day, not enough with which to buy their food. The men were forced to collect sea shells and scrap iron to sell, while the women marketed vegetables or bread.

The story was only slightly different at another Negros plantation. Marlyn Vista, thirty-two, talked about the situation as she sat cross-legged on the bamboo floor of a crude wood shanty at Hacienda Camili. There were no chairs — or beds. The family sits and sleeps on the floor. Light came from a small oil lamp: there is no electricity. Or running water: the community toilet, bathhouse, and laundry is the river.

Vista, a slight woman, is secretary of the local chapter of the sugar workers' union. On this evening, she shared a meal of rice, mangoes, and canned fish. "We usually eat only rice and camote (a sweet potato), casava or banana," she said. "It's very seldom we eat fish or meat, and there is no milk for the children. Milk costs eight pesos [forty cents] a can. The children get diarrhea because sometimes we eat only vegetables growing wild on the bank of the river or they only chew sugar cane," she explained.

Vista's husband walks three miles before daybreak to another plantation where he cuts and loads sugar cane. He gets eighty cents to a dollar a day. Vista says he and the village men no longer get work at Hacienda Camili because the owner opposes their membership in the union. The owner reportedly told them, "You and the union are subversives."

Planation owner Felipe Lacson, thirty-four, is a member of the prosperous ethnic Chinese community. When I interviewed Lacson, he wore silver metal-rimmed glasses and a pink Lacoste shirt, and sat on blue bamboo furniture in an elegant home surrounded by a concrete wall. He said the twenty-six families already owed him $2,500 for three years debts. He said he fired the workers after they stole his fertilizer and sold it. He had told them he could not give them a rice loan during the off-season. The average laborer works only 120 days a year; traditionally, loans are considered the owner's obligation to help families buy food the rest of the time. "Ask your rice consumption from the union," Vista said Lacson had told them. She denied his explanation about the fertilizer, saying that the workers had permission to sell it, a sale which netted them $200.

Lacson agreed that sugar workers weren't paid enough, but explained, "We can't afford to pay them more. Now there's no profit, or it's very small. The sugar planters are caught in the middle. We don't have anything."

The sugar island of Negros used to be the country's richest province. In the 1970s, owners sold 1.5 million tons of sugar to the United States at a controlled price, higher than the world market price, and sold another million tons at home.

But there is no more U.S. quota. Now they sell only 200,000 tons to the U.S. at the Americans' administered price. The need for U.S. imports may be cut altogether in a few years by the use of high fructose corn syrup and other artificial sugars. Thirty percent of the lands that were planted with sugar now are vacant, and a further decrease in planting is expected. Some 80 percent of the plantations face financial problems.

Horacia Starke, president of the New Alliance of Sugar Producers (NASP), said, "Our workers are not paid enough because we don't have enough money from sugar." She said former President Ferdinand Marcos, who set up a marketing monopoly, had stolen the planters' money. NFSW representative Cherniguin acknowledged the impact of the planters' economic difficulties and the cheating by the Marcos government.

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But she noted that even when the planters were prosperous, they did not share their fortunes with the workers.

The peasants are not accustomed to dealing with such a crisis. For generations, they have lived in virtual feudal situations, dependent from birth till death on the planters. Sometimes they hadn't even used family names, but were known as "Jose of" a certain planter. "The workers expect us to do miracles," Lacson said. "In the past, we used to do that, because since our grandfathers, the hacienda has been a paternal system. The grandfathers of some of my workers worked for my grandfather."

It is the abdication of responsibility on the part of the "lords" in this feudal system that has shocked the "serfs" into recognition that they will no longer be guaranteed what they need for subsistence. That is why some have turned to union organizing to win better conditions.

The NFSW was founded in 1971 with the help of Bacolod City Bishop Antonio Fortich, seventy-two, and some Catholic seminarians. Bishop Fortich explained that his views were "liberational." He said, "We understand that the poor themselves must be able to extricate their miserable situation from oppressive socio-economic and political structures. The low salary of the farm workers has got to be improved; this can be done only through the organization of labor unions."

The union has signed up 70,000 out of 300,000 sugar workers in Negros, but efforts at organizing have been hindered by violence against union representatives perpetrated by the military and by thugs hired by the planters. Seven workers were killed and buried on the plantation of the mayor of Kabankalan in 1980. A cook testified to the mayor's responsibility for the torture and killing of the victims, but was harassed by the military and had to leave town. The mayor was later killed by NPA guerrillas.

Six NFSW organizers were murdered in 1984, three were "disappeared" in 1985. Nine youths active in the union were arrested by the military that same year. They were tortured, tied together, and brought to a field to be shot. One escaped and was prepared to testify to the killings. However, the military prepared a warrant charging him with crimes; a union lawyer decided to keep him safely out of court, and the case was dropped for lack of witnesses. In January, the bodies of three union organizers were discovered in a part of the island with a strong military presence. Thirteen other organizers have been imprisoned and charged with rebellion.

Eduardo Claparols charged that the NFSW is a Communist front: "They told the people, 'In two years time that farm will be yours.' " He added that Catholic priests involved with the workers were sowing hatred, disunity, and disorder. "Here in Negros, 80 percent or more of the Catholic church are Communists, including the bishop," he said.

Indeed, the church has taken a high-profile position in favor of the farmworkers. When Pope John Paul II addressed sugar planters in Bacolod City in February 1981 he told them: "The land is a gift of God to all humanity. Because the land is a gift of God, it is not admissible to use this gift in such a manner that the benefits it produces serve only a limited number of people, while the others — the vast majority — are excluded from the benefits which the land yields."

A minority of planters accept the union and have initiated reforms, allowing their workers to plant food crops for home use on vacant land. Some, like Horacia Starke, feel the system needs basic changes; others hope to stave off the NPA insurgents who are led by members of the Philippine Communist Party. Starke feels that the peoples' misery has turned them into guerrillas. "People are hungry and get sick and die. That's why people join the NPA. The basis is economic injustice. That, and the atrocities committed by the military."

Farm workers are wary about admitting to strangers any direct contacts with the NPA guerrillas. "The NPA fighting for farm workers?" repeated a worker at Hacienda Guinsang. "We are not so familiar with the struggle of the NPA; we have heard there is an NPA in the mountains."

But Diosdado Jambongana, thirty-six, the local union secretary, told me, "We heard that the NPA is protecting the rights of the farmers. If we could not find any solution to our problems, if we see the NPA could help, maybe we might support the NPA."

The solutions are evident. Sugar workers are poor because they are locked into a plantation system that in good times excludes them from profits and in bad times does not equitably share the burden. In a world of declining market share, there may be room for fewer sugar plantations. On those that continue to exist, the union should have the right to demand a fair share of profits without fear of repression. But there also must be a government policy aimed at turning many of the sugar plantations into farmland for peasants. Rather than depend on the vagaries of the world sugar market, they would be better off growing rice and corn and raising chickens and pigs on their own plots.

Bishop Fortich agrees: "Land reform should be the first step. The government must buy the lands of the planters at fair prices, and since the planters are educated people, they can go into business. The ones who know only farming should farm the land."

Screen

BLOOMING PAST

'DESERT' & 'VALENTINE'S DAY'

DESERT BLOOM aims high: it's a richly literate but tense film that synthesizes American subject matter and a quirky European technique. Written and directed by newcomer Eugene Coor, the film is unusual from its initial set of images: shots of its heroine, a thirteen-year-old girl (Annabeth Gish), trying on her first eyeglasses. Much of the film

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concerns a sensitive treatment of her coming of age against the blackly comic background of Las Vegas in the early fifties, when atom bombs were being tested on a desert armaments range just to the north.

As Coor documents, Las Vegas was proud, at the time of the Korean war, of being known for something beside divorce and gambling. He crisscrosses his heroine's tale with shots of "Miss A-Bomb" swimsuit contests and tapes of radio broadcasters jingling "Rain or shine its A-bomb time." Annabeth's alcoholic stepfather (a difficult role superbly played by Jon Voight) renames his dumpy service station "Jack's Atomic Gas" and clamors for letting MacArthur drop the bomb on the Chinese. Coor is also good on quieter elements of the past — old Colgate toothpaste commercials, the excitement over the then-new Hoover Dam, and spelling bees (at which Annabeth excels). Coor thus manages a rich mélange of both national and individual characterization.

Often, however, *Desert Bloom* is too rich. Coor uses the oddly framed eyeglasses, for example, to plant an oblique metaphor for the theme of perception with which he tries to unify the film. At a later point, for example, Annabeth claims that her mother (JoBeth Williams) "sees what she wants to see" about her stepfather, a veteran whose memories of World War II haunt his sleep and whose postwar sense of insignificance torments him to alcoholism (and child-beating). While the child's observation is true (the mother is particularly given to malappropriate, mangled proverbs to soothe emotional and physical wounds), it is somehow forced, maneuvered in to link the many complexities of the film. The eyeglasses work less as a poetic device than a visual statement of Annabeth's combination of awkwardness and emerging sensuality.

A "third" parent (a rambunctiously sexual aunt played by Ellen Barkin) provokes the film's crisis. Garbed in floozie silks of the period, she rampages into Las Vegas to get a quickie forty-two-day divorce, advises her niece on costumes to lure men, then lures one too many herself. Coor wants to suggest something about the coincidence of her "divorce party," after waiting the required six weeks, and the first A-bomb test nearby. But the connection is merely poetically suggestive, not dramatically convincing.

Coor thus provides a climactic domestic explosion, but fails to relate it to the military one. Similarly, the parallel between the young heroine's "blooming" and the final flower-like "blooming" of the mushroom cloud is labored. Coor here betrays the weak side of his indebtedness to European directors, who often strain to create tendentious associations through visual means. Unity is thus derived from a kind of pseudo-intellectual cinematic painting by numbers.

Nevertheless, the whole of *Desert Bloom* is not underwhelmed by the sum of its parts. At times the multifaceted plot structure and character portrayals seem too diffuse, but Coor always saves the game by some unique, often exciting gesture. Once Ellen Barkin is sitting in bed putting nail polish on her toenails, and Coor photographs her cupping her elbow on a scooped out orange half precisely balanced on her knee. The shot is perfectly appropriate to her mischievous character; it's also the kind of odd touch that typifies Coor's attempt to catch the texture of real life as once lived without straining for symbolic resonance. The whole ensemble involved in the making of the film — especially the actors and production designers who assembled the fifties sets — share credit for his success.

ON VALENTINE'S DAY is an example of how understatement, for all its value as relief from normal cinematic excess, isn't always a better answer. The film is derived from a screenplay by Horton Foote, the master of down-home understatement in his many studies of the quiet, noble endurance of plain folk in the American South and Southwest. A playwright who grew up under the influence of the Southern Renaissance, Foote has provided film with screenplays for *To Kill a Mockingbird, Tender Mercies*, and the recent *Trip to Bountiful*. He has also encouraged the career of the fine actor, Robert Duvall, first as the recluse Boo Radley in *Mockingbird*, later as *Mercies'* Mac Sledge. The names themselves indicate the source of Foote's strength: people in his world are spare and monosyllabic, but firm and unyielding in crisis.

Where Foote's understatement fails is with his own family, as in *1918*, released several years ago, a study of the impact of the influenza epidemic on his ancestors. In *Valentine's Day*, he goes back to 1910, and attempts to detail his parents' first year of married life in a threadbare boarding house after their elopement. The action includes their reconciliation with his rich (maternal) grandparents, and relations with oddball fellow tenants and a disturbed cousin. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with studying such a closed circle, nor with Foote casting his own daughter, Hallie, as his mother. The problem is neither nepotism nor narcissism, but a static and unfocused style.

Nothing dynamic holds *On Valentine's Day* together. Nothing unites the various strands of the narrative except the common boarding house location. Nothing drives it except nostalgia. Films don't have to have car chases or starships or sex; nor should they be void of the rich character presentation and real, halting, humane language that Foote provides. But drama needs action to depict character, and film normally needs it more than theater, where actors can more easily use physical presence to convey how character issues, per se, are important in themselves. In *On Valentine's Day* the actors, especially Hallie Foote and Steven Hill as her mad in-law, nobly labor to conceal the diffuseness of the script, but there is just too little for them to work with.

In effect, Foote's failure here is rhetorical. Anyone writing about close personal experience often errs on the side of understatement, assuming that the significance and power of events in their own lives is transparent to others. Foote has written *On Valentine's Day* as if this kind of quiet memoir needs no explanation or elaboration. In his best work he has always attempted to portray the natural dignity of family life, an honest and needed labor in film today. But this, unfortunately, resembles an artless home movie.

TOM O'BRIEN

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Books: THE SORCERER'S APPRENTICE

THE TRIUMPH OF POLITICS
WHY THE REAGAN REVOLUTION FAILED
David A. Stockman
Harper & Row, $21.95, 411 pp.

THE REAL DAVID STOCKMAN
THE TRUE STORY OF AMERICA'S MOST CONTROVERSIAL POWER BROKER
John Greenya and Anne Urban
St. Martin's, $15.95, 294 pp.

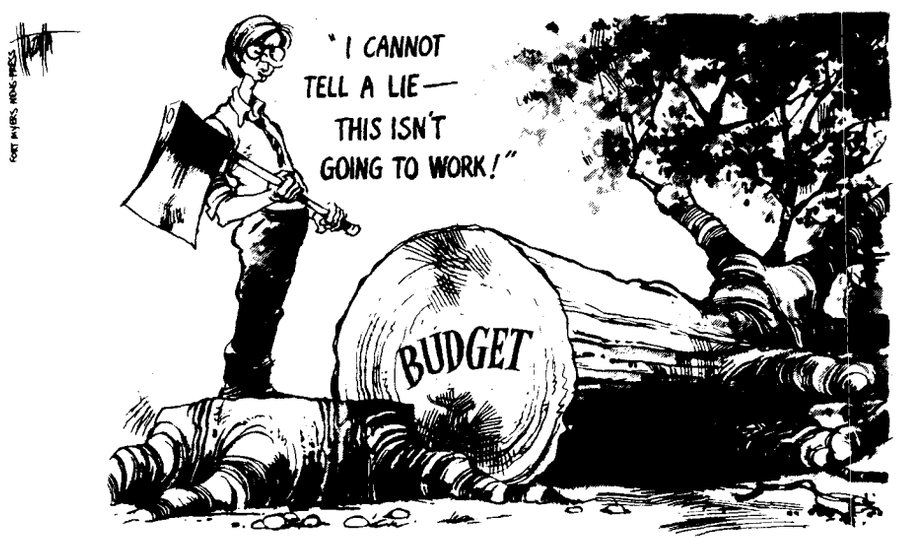
William V. Shannon

DAVID STOCKMAN'S account of his four and one-half years as director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is the political book of the year. It is unlikely that any other book soon to be published will give us as good a picture of the inside workings of the Reagan administration. Political buffs will also want to read the Greenya-Urban book written by two members of Ralph Nader's watchdog group. While Stockman in his memoir is savaging his former colleagues, including the president and most of the cabinet and White House staff, Greenya and Urban in brisk, readable style are telling tales on him from Jude Wanniski, Representative Jack Kemp, and other ideologues who were once his closest allies.

America's open political culture exalts youth and novelty. It is vulnerable to a rush to power by ignorant, determined young men whose ambition exceeds their experience and judgment. Richard Nixon, for example, was a member of the House of Representatives at thirty-three, a senator at thirty-seven, and vice-president and potential president at thirty-nine. David Stockman is in this tradition.

Born into a Michigan farming family, he graduated from Michigan State University in 1968, went to the Harvard Divinity School as much to escape the Vietnam draft as out of sense of religious vocation, and made contacts there that won him a place on the staff of Congressman John Anderson of Illinois. It was 1970 and Stockman was twenty-four. Six years later, he was elected to the House from his own Michigan district and quickly won publicity as an intelligent, articulate critic of government social programs.

In 1980, he met Ronald Reagan when he agreed to serve as stand-in for Anderson, now a third-party presidential candidate, in a series of rehearsals for their televised debate. Stockman, knowing Anderson's mannerisms, speech patterns, and opinions on all issues, made an exceptionally effective stand-in. When Reagan won, he named Stockman as Director of OMB. At thirty-four, this ex-divinity student, ex-congressional aide, and two-term congressman took charge of the nation's budget and tax policies.



It was appropriate that Stockman met Reagan at a television rehearsal. The policies the two of them were to sell to Congress and the country in 1981 were a series of grand illusions, a triumph of the actor's craft rather than of economic analysis. Stockman, facile, intelligent, industrious, was the perfect sorcerer's apprentice.

The "Reagan Revolution" promised to increase spending substantially on national defense, cut taxes, and balance the budget. This was a trinity of nonsense. Anderson said it could only be done "with blue smoke and mirrors." George Bush, before disappearing into the vice-presidency, called it "voodoo economics." In this book, Stockman writes that he was a year into the Reagan Revolution in November 1981 before he realized that the orthodox politicians were right. The tax cut was far too deep and built a structural deficit into the budget. There was no miracle in "supply side" economics.

In his Epilogue, Stockman draws up a partial indictment of Reaganomics, as cogently as anyone could:

> Just beneath the surface [in 1985], the American economy was already being twisted and weakened by Washington's free-lunch joyride. Thanks to the half-revolution adopted in July 1981, more than a trillion dollars had already been needlessly added to our national debt — a burden that will plague us indefinitely. Our national savings has been squandered to pay for a tax cut we could not afford. We have consequently borrowed enormous amounts of foreign capital to make up for the shortfall between our national production and our national spending. . . . The high dollar exchange rate that has been required to attract so much foreign capital has devastated our agriculture, mining, and

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manufacturing. Jobs, capital, and production have been permanently lost. . . . We had prosperity of a sort — but it rested on easy money and borrowed time.

I term this a "partial" indictment because Greenya and Urban would add that the cutbacks in public service jobs, food stamps, Medicaid, and other social programs pushed several million persons below the poverty line. The tax laws were also tilted to favor the rich, and government regulations to protect consumers were seriously weakened.

Stockman refers to a "half-revolution" because he believes that the budget could have been brought into balance if his anti-statist libertarian philosophy had been put into effect to produce a "lean, stingy" government. It would have meant eliminating or drastically overhauling Social Security, Medicare, veterans' benefits, and subsidies to farmers and businessmen. That proved politically impossible, hence his title, "The Triumph of Politics."

As long as the present prosperity, fake or real, continues to prevail, most of the middle class will maintain its political alliance with the upper class. Huge, prolonged deficits are an unreal problem to most voters until their harmful consequences become evident. For the present, therefore, the Stockman book will be read primarily for its gossipy revelations about insiders.

Reagan appears in these pages as a man with a few stubbornly-held convictions and unaware of much that is going on around him. "Reagan seemed as far above the detail work . . . as a ceremonial monarch is above politics." Serene and passive, "he gave no orders, no commands; asked for no information; expressed no urgency."

Stockman's book can also be read as a cautionary tale on the dangers of intellectual enthusiasm. In describing his intellectual pilgrimage, Stockman, now at thirty-nine a battle-scarred veteran of the Washington wars gone off to make money on Wall Street, puts some ironic distance between himself and his past. Nevertheless, his ideological hunger and his need to find a mentor are astonishing. His book could be retitled, "Portrait of the Politician as a Young Ideologue."

Reading Reinhold Niebuhr, Stockman says, "the scales fell from my eyes as I turned those pages." He discovers the Austrian philosopher of the free market: "I plunged into economics. . . . I read everything in sight. . . . I emerged a disciple of F.A. Hayek." Going to work for John Anderson, "I became a kind of adopted son to him." He meets Jude Wanniski "who reordered everything I had previously known or thought about economics." He meets economist Arthur Laffer, "a dazzling thinker." And again, "the real star quest as far as I was concerned was (Irving) Kristol. To me, Kristol was a secular incarnation of the Lord Himself."

Ideas are important and should be welcome in any political circle. But introducing so light-headed and impressionable a lover of ideas as Stockman into the intellectual vacuum surrounding Ronald Reagan was one of the more unfortunate events in recent political history. The redeeming charm of Stockman's memoir is that no one recognizes that more clearly than the author himself.

The other side of soullessness

CHILDREN OF LIGHT

Robert Stone

Knopf, $17.95, 258 pp.

Robert Jones

ONE wants very much to take Robert Stone as seriously as he takes himself. In A *Hall of Mirrors* (Ballantine Books, 1975), *Dog Soldiers*, (Houghton Mifflin, 1981), *A Flag for Sunrise* (Knopf, 1981), and in his new novel, *Children of Light*, he has given us a portrait of post-sixties America that chronicles the country's decay through the voices of its burnt-out cases. The figure of the drifter, who appears in different guises in each of his novels, has come to symbolize for him the aimlessness that he perceives at the heart of American culture.

What separates Robert Stone's vision from most other novelists is that he creates America at a distance. Vietnam is the geographical center of *Dog Soldiers*, just as Central America is the heart of *A Flag for Sunrise*. Even *Children of Light*, which is about Hollywood, takes place in Mexico. In removing the action of his novels from the land they address, Stone captures the feeling of geographical impunity that pervades the United States. Its battles are played out on other shores. In this eerie vision of exile, Stone depicts American power as an aftertremor that devastates each foreign place we inhabit, while the country itself remains essentially unchanged. For Stone, the historical difference of the last twenty years is that we are now all part of this devastation. Each new generation born is as much a victim of the unassailable American ideal as the lands we have failed to conquer.

Stone chose Robert Lowell's poem "Children of Light" as the epigraph to his first novel, *A Hall of Mirrors*, and has now returned to the image, from I Thessalonians: "Ye are all the children of the light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober." Stone's characters never sleep, but then, most of them are amphetamine freaks; their watchfulness is a drug-induced paranoia. Stone's obsession with the empty promise each of us inherits emerges through these characters' dissolution. The banner we are meant to carry now brings with it, as Lowell says, "the Serpent's seeds of light," the fake illumination that reveals blindness instead of truth. "Sunrise, hast thou a flag for me?" Emily Dickinson asks in her poem. This plea is somewhere in the minds of each of Stone's characters, the longing to attach oneself to a common ground and be made to feel part of a world that one has in no way been equipped to see.

In Stone's world, the other side of this soullessness is inevitable violence. His characters wait endlessly for something to happen, but they haven't a clue as to what they expect. "I don't know what I'm doing or why I do it or what it's

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like," Converse says in *Dog Soldiers*. Violence is the natural response to this short-circuit of emotion, and the most memorable scenes in Stone's novels always involve brutality: for example, Hicks's gratuitous murder of the drug dealer with a needle through the vein in *Dog Soldiers* or the torture of Sister Justin in *A Flag for Sunrise*. Moments like these are written with a heartlessness and clarity that are like nothing else in contemporary fiction. Their vividness is such that you forget you are reading a book and the narrative takes on the power of the best cinematic image.

But Stone's downfall as a writer is that he is not content to stop there. He shares with too many other novelists the cursed desire to be significant. And so he wields ideas about as if they were baseball bats in the hands of one of his more deranged characters. This propensity to tell us everything he learned in school mars all that is good in *Dog Soldiers* and *A Flag for Sunrise*, but it cripples altogether *Children of Light*.

In *Children of Light*, Stone miniaturizes the metaphor of war that has been the foundation of his previous novels. In a recent interview in *The Paris Review*, he said of the perpetual conflict that defines our lives: "It is the simple truth that, wherever you are, there is an armed enemy present, not far away." Through the characters in *Children of Light* — a schizophrenic film star, a drug-dependent screen writer, and other types of Hollywood flotsam — Stone seeks to personalize this "armed enemy" and show how we are dangerous and careless with each other.

The race wars of *A Hall of Mirrors*, the Vietnam and drug wars of *Dog Soldiers*, and the guerrilla wars of *A Flag for Sunrise*, enable Stone to measure his characters' disaffection against a prefabricated conflict. Amidst all that din, we are less likely to notice the weakness of their motivation. In *Children of Light*, there are no land mines, crazed soldiers of fortune, or drug runners to threaten, so Stone must demonstrate how destruction is a property of the self. But we enter his characters' lives in their middle age, and their madness and drug addiction are presented as if they were a natural state. And so we witness their inevitable decline without knowing how they came to be where they are or caring how much further they have to fall.

Gordon Walker's success is passed by the time we meet him in *Children of Light*. But years before, he wrote a screen treatment for Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, and now it is being produced in Mexico with his former lover, Lu Anne Bourgeois, as its star. Walker has been edged-out of the production, but it was to have been the achievement of his career. He finds himself deserted by his wife, and with a drug habit instead of a job to occupy his days. And so he insinuates himself onto the movie set, "to make my presence felt," he says.

But by the time Walter leaves for Mexico, Lu Anne already has a loose grip on her chronic madness. She has begun to hear voices and hallucinate figures she calls "the Long Friends." Walker arrives just as she films the suicidal swim that concludes the movie. Her increasing terror, her identification with her character in the movie, and her anticipation of meeting Walker become unbearable pressures. The novel builds to Lu Anne's breakdown as she is once again drawn to Walker's arms.

Walker does not go to Mexico to consciously wreck the production. He goes to see what will happen. He knows only that he has the power to unnerve everything around him. Stone's characters all share the kind of self-absorption that is often mistaken for reflection. They endlessly analyze their feelings, but with no sense of the world beyond themselves or of the responsibility that lies beyond immediate action. Near the end of *Children of Light*, Lu Anne asks Walker, "Can't you help me?" And Walker responds, " 'I would die for you.' It was true, he thought, but not really helpful."

Nothing makes a difference. Stone wants us to accept his vision as ironic and tragic simultaneously, but it rarely amounts to more than the worst kind of bogus existentialism. I think Robert Stone's intention in *Children of Light* is much like Joan Didion's in *Play It As It Lays*. Her novel is also about wasted Hollywood victims, but Stone lacks Didion's ability to convey B.Z.'s and Maria's history in a few elliptical sentences, and especially to convince us of their exhaustion. Didion makes us believe that B.Z. has played-out every possible hand, so his suicide seems the natural end of the game. But in *Children of Light*, we never believe Gordon and Lu Anne are worn-out by life. They behave more like children who play with drugs and each other's emotions because all their other toys are broken.

We are meant to be moved by Lu Anne's descent into madness, but Stone has written these episodes with the pitch of a Grand Guignol melodrama. Her "Long Friends" whisper words like "malheureuse" in her ear and remind one more of French nannies than hallucinations. At times their voices mimic the chatter of Quaker maidens or sometimes sound like characters from a minstrel show. Everything is "literary" in the most artificial sense. There is no naturalness to Stone's prose, nothing that makes one feel that this disintegration is happening to a human being.

When Walker reflects upon Lu Anne's madness, he thinks: "It was stronger than he was, and evil. Evil, a word attaching to false consciousness." Stone's habit of sneaking extraneous concepts into his characters' minds undermines any sympathy the reader might feel for them. As exasperation for the author grows, the characters become increasingly charmless. Attaching "false consciousness" to Walker's reflection adds nothing to the story but pretentiousness. But this is how Stone attempts to add depth to his narrative where he cannot create it with characterization or style.

By the time Lu Anne begins her ascent of Mount Carmel and the culmination of her breakdown, Stone has lost the reader altogether. The scene is full of thunder and rain, false stigmatas, and Lu Anne dancing naked before clouds as purple as the prose. And when Lu Anne is ready to die and swims out to sea, she turns to Walker with the words: "Come," she called. "Or else save me." The choices Stone gives Lu Anne are meaningless ones. Walker can die with her or save her; it amounts to the same thing in the end.

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breakdown in Lu Anne's empty act, but he doesn't persuade us that she has lost anything. Her suicide is as pointless as her life. And in drawing this parallel between Lu Anne's madness and the real insanity of the modern world, Stone cheapens the tragedy of our own misplaced dreams and the despair that comes from having lost track of the hopes that were once thought possible.

Generations of intrigue

A PERFECT SPY

John le Carré

Knopf, $18.95, 475 pp.

Barbara A. Bannon

CLEARLY, of all the eleven novels he has written, this is the one that means the most personally to "John le Carré," born David Cornwell. This is because, as has been reported, one of the pivotal characters in the novel, Rick Pym, father of the "Perfect Spy," Magnus Pym, is closely modeled on his own father, Ronald Cornwell.

In this lies much of the novel's great fascination and also its one weakness. At times le Carré-Cornwell becomes so obsessed with the catharsis of freeing himself from the memory of Ronald Cornwell, and how it has haunted him, that he goes on too long about "Rick," and we begin to feel ourselves almost a little bored, a feeling that does not last long, however.

Rick, that gentlemanly, genial charmer is an ace con artist, as was le Carré's real-life father, Ronald, a man who can draw to himself so dedicated a band of cronies that one of them will even go to prison in his place. No matter how improbable or exotic Rick's next scheme will be, "the court," his loyal followers, and a constantly changing cast of "lovelies" will back him.

Yet at the heart of the novel remains le Carré's brilliant evocation of the espionage scene. He has never been more convincing than he is here in showing us how Magnus, a brilliant young man, by this time well aware of his father's duplicities and his mother's descent into madness, begins to charm his own way through life. Skating on thin ice all the time, he manages Oxford, some frightening small errands on behalf of British intelligence, and becomes the protégé of a new father figure, Jack Brotherhood, who will run Magnus for years as a British secret agent, while he officially mounts the diplomatic ladder.

There is another father figure awaiting Magnus in Bern, where he "was in Switzerland at last, the spiritual home of natural spies." This is Czechoslovakian Axel, a man whom Magnus betrays out of a desire to court favor with Brotherhood. It is no coincidence that le Carré chose "Brotherhood" as a name for the top British manager of spies.

The entire novel is told in interesting contrasts. We know on very nearly the first page that Magnus has holed up in what is for him a "safe house" on the remote Devon coast. Magnus has done so immediately on learning of his father's death, abandoning wife, teen-age son, everyone, while he sets down in writing the "mea culpa" of his entire life.

We know how desperately Brotherhood and Magnus's wife, Mary, are searching for him, and here we are treated to a brilliant sequence of encounters between British and American intelligence men, each lying through his teeth, members of the same "team" out to savage each other mercilessly. Like Graham Greene, le Carré is a writer whose characters can never totally evade moral commitment. This was certainly true in the Smiley series of novels: *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy; The Honourable Schoolboy; Smiley's People.* The more tangled and complex the characters' dilemmas become, the more le Carré is aware of all they are going through and the better he conveys it to us.

> *"He's a searcher. Isn't that enough? In our profession I am sure we should not ask for more. . . . He spied. Selectively, it is true. But treasonably it is also true. And often very energetically . . . When his life is happy he believes in God and wants everyone to have a gift. When he is down he will sulk and refuse to go to church. Those of us who run him have to live with that."*
>
> John le Carré
> *The Perfect Spy*

Very early on Magnus Pym learns to lie and to "live on several levels at once." He becomes an expert at it and all the while he smiles most charmingly. As his first wife Belinda says of him to Brotherhood after his disappearance, "He was a new man every day. He'd come home as one person. I'd try to match him. In the morning he'd be someone else."

Or, as Magnus Pym himself puts it in the "mea culpa" he is writing, speaking about his Oxford days:

> He paraded pleasurable surprise when he heard that his tutors thought the world of him, and a stern-jawed priestly pride on learning that the Army loved him, too. He modestly demurred or modestly boasted. He weeded out the half-believers from the believers and did not rest until he had converted the pack of them to paid-up life membership in the Pym supporters club.

In short, he became indeed the perfect spy and his father's son.

And when he casts his lot with both British Jack Brotherhood and returned Czech comrade, Axel, whom he once betrayed, he is able to write quite sincerely, "Axel was his keeper and his virtue, he was the altar on which Pym had laid his secrets and his life. He had become the part of Pym that was not owned by anybody else."

Perhaps the most tantalizing aspect of *A Perfect Spy* is what it does and does not tell us about David Cornwell himself, who was once in the British Foreign Service. As Joseph Lelyveld wrote in the *New York Times Magazine, A Perfect Spy* is the first of le Carré's novels not submitted to the British Foreign Office for vetting. Le Carré has steadfastly refused to be interviewed and the Lelyveld

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article is the only one he would submit to on behalf of this book. He is a very private person, and that is why the publication of this, in part autobiographical, novel is so remarkable.

If it frees Cornwell from the torment of the past, that will be eminently satisfying. One thing I can tell you. Cornwell arrived at the pseudonym of "le Carré" very simply. Driving through Paris one evening he looked out and saw a particularly handsome square (*le carré*) and made the name his own with very satisfying results for readers world-wide.

Dealing from a full deck

MEDITATIONS ON THE TAROT
A JOURNEY INTO CHRISTIAN HERMETICISM

Anonymous
Amity House, $44.95, 658 pp.

Theophane Boyd

PROBABLY you are not interested in Christian hermeticism, still less in the Tarot cards. Neither am I. But don't turn the page. This book is special.

The German edition has an introduction by Hans Urs von Balthasar, no less. He writes: "A thinking, praying Christian of unmistakable purity reveals to us the symbols of Christian Hermeticism, leading us meditatively, by way of the Major Arcana, into the deeper, all-embracing wisdom of the Catholic Mystery. . . . The superabundance of genuine, fruitful insights which he conveys, certainly justifies bringing these Meditations to a wider circle of readers."

The American edition quotes Basil Pennington: "This is the most extraordinary book I have ever read."

Abbot Thomas Keating says:

> This book, in my view, is the greatest contribution to date toward the rediscovery and renewal of the Christian contemplative tradition of the Fathers of the church and the high Middle Ages. With its firm grasp of tradition, its balance, wisdom, profundity, openness to truth, and comprehensive approach to reality, it deserves to be the basis of a course in spirituality in every Christian institution of higher learning, and what would be even better, the point of departure and unifying vision of the whole curriculum.

The book takes the form of twenty-two letters to an "unknown friend," you, the reader. Each letter is a meditation on one of the twenty-two picture cards, or Major Arcana, of the Tarot deck. An arcanum, the author explains, is not a secret; rather it is that which it is necessary to "know" in order to be fruitful in a given domain of spiritual life. It is that which must be actively present in our consciousness — or even in our subconscious — in order to render us capable of making discoveries, engendering new ideas, conceiving pur-

(Continued on page 312)

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Religious booknotes

Living in cities —real & imagined

Mary Gerhart

SOME CITIES are called sacred places. If they are sacred, they may provide moments in which "reality" discloses itself for someone who dwells or visits there in the flesh or in imagination. History and life can suddenly converge in a single site — Manhattan in a Woody Allen movie or Dublin in one of James Joyce's epiphanies.

Two monumental books which record such sites are Christopher Hibbert's *Rome: The Biography of a City* and F.E. Peters's *Jerusalem: The Holy City in the Eyes of Chroniclers, Visitors, Pilgrims, and Prophets from the Days of Abraham to the Beginnings of Modern Times*.

In his "biography" of Rome, Hibbert, a seasoned chronicler of other historical events and people, acts as a historical tour guide. He retrieves both sacred and secular history in this eminently fair and beautiful book. Figures lost in less ambitious accounts come to life here — for example, Cola di Rienzo, the "messianic demagogue" of the fourteenth century, Queen Christina, the unconventional exile who brought pope and count alike to break with sexist protocol, and Urban VIII, the pope who made Bernini a "Barbarini man." Hibbert provides recurring motifs through the many layers of Roman history so that readers can keep their sense of direction without getting lost in details.

Rome: The Biography of a City, *by Christopher Hibbert. W.W. Norton. $25, 387 pp.*

Peters's *Jerusalem* speaks in many voices. As its subtitle indicates, this chronicle of Jerusalem is constructed with excerpts from documents written by those who were attracted to the city — whether as ruler, archeologist, tourist, or religious person. The claim of the three major monotheistic religions — Judaism, Islam, and Christianity — that Jerusalem is their Holy City has made them, according to Peters, "neighbors in a narrow space, [where] they continue to debate their family ties and fight their sad and bitter fight over their father's [Abraham's] property."

Jerusalem plunges the reader into both the despair and the glory of the city: the anxiety of the citizens when tribunes come to extort more taxes, the barricading of the city in times of invasion, the threat to crowds attending liturgies that they might be trampled to death, the maintaining and repairing of the Temple and the Dome, the excitement of the daily bazaars where all three quarters of the city engage in reciprocal commerce. Forthrightness about their impressions is a common characteristic of the writers who span the centuries: Josephus, Eusebius, Sozomen, Egeria, Muquaddasi, Maimonides, Nasir-i Khusraw, Goethe, Chateaubriand, and many others.

Jerusalem: The Holy City in the Eyes of Chroniclers, Visitors, Pilgrims, and Prophets from the Days of Abraham to the Beginnings of Modern Times, *by F.E. Peters. Princeton, $35, 656 pp.*

Human imagination, readily stirred by these two legendary cities, is also engaged by the dreams, visions, and possibilities embodied in non-historical legends and stories.

William Bausch makes his case for the need of story in religious understanding first of all by presenting a host of well-told tales from a variety of sources — Indian folklore, Italo Calvino's collection of Italian folktales, Franz Kafka, C.S. Lewis, Bruno Bettelheim, contemporary storytellers, among others. Alternating stories with commentary, Bausch also attempts to rectify the relationship between narrative and theology. This attempt, however, is conventional and does not draw upon the recent developments in theology; nor are the stories themselves presented with a critical understanding. But this book is remarkable as a source for brief, moving stories and anecdotes with religious significance.

Storytelling: Imagination and Faith, *by William J. Bausch. Twenty-third Publications, $7.95 paper, 232 pp.*

Gilbert Keith Chesterton was an earlier source of such *aperçus*. In his after-dinner address at the Chesterton Celebration in 1983 on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of GKC's visiting professorship at Notre Dame University, Frank J. Sheed recalled how life for Catholics in England changed just after 1900 thanks to Chesterton and Belloc. "While Catholics went to bed rather quietly drawing no attention to themselves [to avoid being publicly slandered], these two men . . . would argue it out with anybody who would stand up." Besides arguing, Chesteron wrote voluminously and in different genres. Four of the seven brief essays in *A Chesterton Celebration* examine his contributions in philosophy, detective stories, poetry, and literary criticism. Two of these essays show that the effects of Chesterton's work continue today: Frederick Crossan's "Father

A Chesterton Celebration at the University of Notre Dame, *edited by Rufus William Rauch. University of Notre Dame, 1983, $9.95, 96 pp.*

MARY GERHART *teaches hermeneutics, religion, and literature at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York.*

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Brown, Sherlock Holmes, and the Mystery of Man" and Lawrence Clipper's "Chesterton on Dickens: A Closer Look" (in which we learn why literary criticism still calls certain interpretations of Dickens's novels, "Chestertonian"). The essays as a whole show the effect of one person's imagination on several generations.

One of the most intelligent discussions of fantasy literature can be found in the first three chapters of an unpretentious book, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Myth, Morality, and Religion*, by a philosopher who, although he is a logician and metaphysician, has done some fantasy writing himself. Richard L. Purtill differentiates among original myth, literary myth, and philosophical myth (or allegory). Of special note are his references to the way that the Christian Gospels are both like and unlike original myth. Purtill thinks that both Gospel and original myth fulfill the "need for significant form," i.e., the ability to "relate the things that happen to us as parts of an understandable whole." He cites Chesterton's *The Everlasting Man* to argue for an artistic basis for myth. He accounts for Tolkien's own lack of clarity on some aspects of myth and gives a sensitive, critical analysis of Tolkien's view of women in his work. Finally, he distinguishes fantasy literature from science fiction before going on to do an illuminating reading of Tolkien's stories.

***J.R.R.Tolkien**, by Richard L. Purtill. Harper & Row, $12.95, 154 pp.*

Purtill once tried to write a book about C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Charles Williams, but says he finally decided that Williams was too different to be included. Glen Cavaliero, however, gives Williams undivided attention in *Charles Williams: Poet of Theology* and explores the ways that his poetic and theological imagination come together in literature of the "fantastic." Comparing Williams with other twentieth-century writers of fantasy, Cavaliero discusses Williams's originality — especially in the latter's revision of classical epic material from the Arthurian tales and Dante's *Divine Comedy* — together with his literary strengths and shortcomings. Cavaliero relates Williams theologically to writers of the early church (from whom Williams derived the principle of "coinherence" of the divine and the human) and to the medieval incarnational theology of Duns Scotus.

***Charles Willliams: Poet of Theology**, by Glen Cavaliero. Wm.B. Eerdmans, $8.95, 199 pp.*

More Than Meets the Eye: Ritual and Parish Liturgy is a careful, persuasive, well-exampled, and passionate treatment of the role of imagination in liturgy. Patrick W. Collins draws both from his own experience and from well-known theorists of imagination to argue that the "stripped" version of the post-Vatican II liturgy calls for the best aesthetic imagination. He speaks of liturgical renewal as being "wounded" so long as it lacks imagination, and he argues that psyche needs imagination in order to take a "creative stance in life." Descriptions of how successful liturgies came about provide a practical dimension to the book which never, however, becomes a superficial matter of "how-to" for every situation. The book is theologically informed by David Tracy's notion of the "analogical imagination" and the work of others such as William Lynch, Owen Barfield, Susanne Langer, and John XXIII. The last chapter, "Parable of Ritual," relating liturgy to movement and dance, is a must for any liturgist's consideration.

***More Than Meets the Eye: Ritual and Parish Liturgy**, by Patrick W. Collins. Paulist Press, $6.95 paper, 151 pp.*

The most intrepid imaginer of cities, Augustine of Hippo, wrote that he conceived *The City of God* to refute those who blamed Christianity for the sack of Rome in 410. If we ask if there is any connection between dwelling in historical or imaginary cities, we could do worse than Charlie Citrine's subtle reply at the end of Saul Bellow's novel, *Humboldt's Gift*. Charlie is leaving the re-burial of his friend and failed poet Humboldt when he is asked what kind of spring flower that is near the sidewalk. He answers, "Search me. . . . I'm a city boy myself. They must be crocuses."

However real our reluctance to name things we think we don't know, perhaps what ultimately matters is that we do so with imagination.

MARY GERHART

Drawings from **The Art of G.K. Chesterton**, *by Alzina Stone Dale. Loyola University Press, $24.95, 136 pp.*

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suits. It is a "ferment" or an "enzyme" whose presence stimulates the spiritual and psychic life.

Then the author goes on to make this bold assertion about the set of twenty-two arcana: "They are a complete, entire, invaluable school of meditation, study, and spiritual effort — a masterly school in the art of learning."

Let's look at a few of these "ferments." The first is the Magician — or juggler, a player of tricks at a county fair. It represents the rapport of personal effort and spiritual reality. It tells you what is necessary to know in order to enter into the school of spiritual exercises which is the Tarot: "Learn at first concentration without effort; transform work into play; make every yoke that you have accepted easy and every burden that you bear light."

Now just think — can you recall ever having read a "spiritual" book that began in any such way? "Learn at first concentration without effort." When did you last hear a sermon that mentioned concentration? Concentration without effort? It shows up often enough in Eastern traditions — one-pointedness, *samadhi*, calm abiding. It has an honored place in the eight-fold noble path of Buddhism. It shows up in the first line of Pantajali's Yoga Sutras. Olympic athletes know about concentration, and Goethe says that a person who wants to accomplish something of worth will "quietly and unceasingly direct the greatest force upon the smallest point." Concentration without effort — "a profound silence of desires, of preoccupations, of the imagination, of the memory, and of discursive thought." Where this silence is, there work can become as play, and the chosen yoke can become easy, the burden light.

The theory embodied in this first arcanum, the Magician, consists in the basic unity of the natural, human, and divine worlds. The recognition of this unity of all beings suggests a method of knowledge, the method of analogy. As the author goes on to distinguish different types of analogical thinking, giving examples from the Bible, it becomes clear that this school of meditation which is the Tarot, will not be a school of some simple, very austere type of concentrative meditation, but rather the luxuriant world of the Western monk's *lectio divina*. This author, a Russian layman, is reading the twenty-two playing cards of the Tarot the way monks once read the Bible. I say *once* read the Bible.

> *Now the Arcanum, "The Fool," has a double meaning . . . as a model and as a warning at the same time. For on the one hand it teaches the freedom of transcendental consciousness elevated above the things of this world, and on the other hand it clearly presents a very impressive warning of the peril that this elevation comprises – lack of concern, inadequacy, irresponsibility. . . . It deals with two modes of sacrificing the intellect* (sacrificium intellectus). *For the intellect can be sacrificed in two different ways: it can be placed in the service of transcendental consciousness or it can be simply abandoned.*
>
> Anonymous
> *Meditations on the Tarot*

What does the author present as the second "ferment," the second arcanum? Looking at the picture of the High Priestess, seated, holding a book in her lap, he reflects on the words of St. John, "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him." He asserts that Christian yoga does not aspire directly to unity, but rather to the unity of two. This is, of course, as basic an issue as you can find, the issue of unity and duality. Today, with renewed interest in mysticism, and the Eastern philosophies making their influence felt, it is good to hear an intelligent case made for a Christian dualism, and for the primacy of the Good, and therefore of Love over Being itself. Read it.

Meditating on the third arcanum, the Empress, he speaks of sacred magic — human action in which the divine power is operative, since the heart is pure. The human and the divine will come together. This is the science of love. Its aim is always liberating action. Thus it was with the miracles of Christ, and the special image of it is the incarnation itself: *et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine*.

And so it goes on, for 650 pages, seeing in these simple pictures so many enzymes, ferments — the Emperor, the Pope, the Hanged Man, the Fool, the Hermit, the Devil, Death, the Lovers. With reverence and intelligence the author speaks of the great mystery of grace, of Calvary as ultimate revelation, of the Eucharist, Mary, the virgin.

I find myself with this question: If you began to think it would be worth your while to take a sabbatical, to go off to some monastery in order to find death; if you began to aspire to some complete, entire, invaluable school of meditation, study, and spiritual effort — a masterly school in the art of learning — then I ask, to which monastery school in the art of learning could you go? And if not to a monastery, then where? A university? A Buddhist place? There are some of our monasteries in which you could find silence, but where could you find the kind of guidance that is manifest in every chapter of this book?

Richard Payne is to be congratulated on his boldness in publishing this book. I think his middle name is Boldness. When he was with Paulist Press he launched

THE LADY POPE

that handsome sixty-volume set of Classics of Western Spirituality. At Crossroad he launched the twenty-five volume Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest. Now with his own new company, Amity House, he begins with a 650-page work on the Tarot, followed by works of such authors as Thomas Keating, Robert Mueller, Mar Gregorios. He also hopes to publish sixty volumes of Classics of Eastern Spirituality. There are countries where such a man would be subsidized as a national living treasure. *Ad multos annos*.

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Spinner of the red thread

THE MOTHER'S SONGS
IMAGES OF GOD THE MOTHER
Meinrad Craighead
Paulist, $9.95, 79 pp.

Frederick Franck

"THIS IS beautiful, extraordinarily beautiful," I kept saying to myself while leafing through this book. I had picked it up rather skeptically, expecting a blend of feminist acrimony and sentimentality. But at once a formidable artist spoke out of some forty luminous ink-on-scratchboard icons — "images" is too neutral to do them justice — and a text that breathes that poetic spirit which is "an agony of mind in utter solitude" (Blyth) and in which the "use" of this solitude, to speak with A.N. Whitehead, is religious. Here profoundly so.

Feminism? No, I detect not a trace of an "ism," but a vision that springs from pure experiencing, visceral experiencing in the female mode and that brings the ancient myth of the Great Mother to life. Let theologians — if they must — castigate this outcry of almost telluric, sensuously feminine spirituality! This is not a thesis, it is a witness to the incarnation of the great myth as the artist saw it transmitted through her great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother, to her own living flesh. Every page celebrates in icon and in words the female aspect of divine Reality, as if to undo centuries of its repression by the Father-God image through its jealously male and celibate stewardship.

The book is timely, now that the myth of white-male superiority and omniscience is so eroded, the failure of the masculine monopoly in the management of worldly and spiritual affairs all too glaring. Some fifteen years ago a joke, then still blasphemously comical, did the rounds about an angel fallen to earth, who, when questioned about what the Lord really looked like, answered: "She is black." The quip having become parable is no longer amusing.

Meinrad Craighead was born fifty or so years ago in Little Rock, Arkansas. The atmosphere of her early childhood was that of the still lovable, human America of James Agee's "Knoxville 1911." She attended Catholic schools in Chicago, eventually got her M.F.A. from the University of Wisconsin, spent time in Florence, Vienna, Spain, and fourteen years as a nun in an English Benedictine abbey. In 1983 she found her natural landscape in New Mexico.

I, neither woman, nun, nor even card-carrying Catholic, felt an immediate bond with her when on the very first page I read of an early childhood experience we almost share. In her case it happened when looking into her dog's eyes: "She held my gaze. . . . I watched the dog and she watched me . . . a balance of equal weights. As I looked into her eyes, I knew I would never travel further. . . ." In my own earliest seeing into the mystery of existence, at six, it was not a dog in Arkansas, but a purple field flower in a Dutch meadow, that looked back at me, looked me in the eye, and I knew that I would never travel further, knew as she did, "This is God."

Do such epiphanies occur in every childhood; are they mostly forgotten? Probably. But those who cannot forget, become, in one way or another, artists driven to live this first flash of bliss again and again. The artist differs from scientist, philosopher, theologian in being penetrated by the mystery of dog's eye, mountain, flower, instead of trying to penetrate it. This shared flash of infantine illumination offered me the key to her universe, made me see the originality of imagery and word, an originality in the ancient Chinese sense — of being in touch with the origins, authenticity.

Detail, from "Stars," by Meinrad Craighead, The Mother's Songs.

I reflected on parallel phenomena. William Blake came to mind, Odilon Redon, and faint hints of Chagall. The coloristic opulence of these archetypal images recalled Klimt, perhaps, Viennese "art nouveau." Archaic as are their themes, they are as intensely contemporary as they are "anti-modernistic" to borrow Kundera's term, typical of the re-humanization that had to follow decades of that value-free "modernart" which famished the heart. Any temptation to label this work "decorative" would betray blindness to the predominance of mythical content over the form.

In this work the ecstatic linkage between art and Eros on the one hand and the sacred, sacramental, worshipful on the other, is exceptionally strong, so explicit that at times I wondered whether such total submersion in pure *yin* hardly balanced by traces of *yang* — in the memories of father and grandfather — might not be another symptom of our culturally regressive tendencies. Who knows?

It would be easy to gloat over the almost obsessive frequency with which breasts, bellies, umbilical cord, "menstrual fire," "pictures painted on the walls of my womb" occur. But nothing is scabrous or coarse here. On the contrary. Image and word are consistently and nobly mythopoetic: ". . . cows grazed my mouth / deer my breasts / birds searched my face / spiders my hands / snakes my belly . . ." or ". . . running through my dark halls / and bright courts and high gates . . . reached the place and walked in / right through the middle of my heart."

Marvelous word-plays, as on "lodestone, motherlode, lodestar" abound, and equally brilliant image-puns: as the red one, "Cauldron," in which great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother

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become one immense and winged pomegranate, carrying three overlapping ancestral faces, crowned with a raven's profile. Or the elegantly powerful Wisdom icon in which a majestic owl dominates black-silvery cosmic hieroglyphs. Equally moving is the word-picture of sheer evil, in which Meinrad relives a wizened, "white-trash" crone spitting tarlike tobacco juice into her, the "papist" child's eyes.

The fifteenth-century Zen poet Ikkyu, abbot of Daitokuji, Kyoto, an eccentric lover of women in the ultra-puritan line of great Zen masters, coined the term Red Thread Zen for his brand of Zen that did not repress but *stressed* the Red Thread, the umbilical cord that binds even the most spiritualized ascetic to a woman, a mother, the Earth. Craighead's Red Thread Catholicism — I did not find a single conventionally "Christian" symbol in her iconography — communicates in her language of word and image a universal religious attitude to the mystery of existence, one of great profundity. One hopes that this treasure, which Paulist managed to produce for a paltry $9.95, will open many eyes to that ever underrated and misunderstood reality: a specifically feminine spirituality.

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I THE SUPREME

Augusto Roa Bastos
Translated by Helen R. Lane
Knopf, $18.95, 448 pp.

Ronald Christ

IN the beginning God dictated light, land, water, and creatures; and ever since, politics and literature have repeatedly attempted the same. In each case — to use the Spanish title of this novel as an example — there is a trinitarian procession between the maker (*Yo* or *I*), the made or addressed (*el* — punning *él* here — or *he, him, the other*), and the mode of recognized effect (*Supremo* or *Supreme One*). Inverting and further entangling this inextricable cavalcade (what used to be called its "aspiration") to monstrously logical complexity, the exiled Paraguayan writer, Augusto Roa Bastos, has *composed*, literally, from some 20,000 documents and his own inspiration, what he describes as neither the fictionalized biography nor narrated history of a real-life dictator.

Instead, he has "compiled" a sum of fragmented texts, by and about the dictator himself, that we must recognize as the most magnificent work, most magnificently translated, to come from Spanish into English in almost a quarter of a century. A tattered portrait of the dictating dictator dictated; the ventriloquized performance of Paraguay's nineteenth-century "Perpetual Dictator" (from 1816-1840). José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia agonizes over his astounding life's performance, is sometimes perplexed as to whether his own or his astute dummy's lips are doing the talking.

Whichever may be the case, this is a profoundly spoken novel that is impossible to imagine as being spoken, a sort of political *As I Lay Dying* by way of *Tristram Shandy*. Every textual fold is pleated by sumptuous wordplay; arcane, absurd, and (mostly) accurate annotation and quotation; as well as fact so much stranger than fiction that nobody knows for sure which evil lurks in the mind of what possible man — or even the correct date (1766 or 1776?) of the dictator's birth. Because whatever else *I the Supreme* may be — and it is many things, including biography, bibliography, anachronistic history, meta-fiction — it is a novel that attracts by repulsion all the vast archival material collated by Roa Bastos.

Roa Bastos himself disappears behind the screen of "Compiler" — like Descartes's God after winding up the universal clock. Behind the scenes he both contradicts and confirms the dying Francia's confessions and ruminations, which were either dictated to his bumbling or fiendishly clever secretary, Policarpo Patiño, recorded in the dictator's own ledgers (where he credits his good thoughts and deeds, debits the bad), or pronounced in a "Perpetual Circular," his personal encyclical to instruct the nation. The collision of data and views, like the tension between spoken and written word, is the equivalent of the book's plot. The novel gets its start when a vilifying pasquinade is nailed to the cathedral door about this strange figure, a dictator who welcomed notable visitors to his country only to keep them captive for years, who developed his nation's resources and sealed them from external contact, who achieved fame from books reviling his reign of terror and inspired praising portraits from Sir Richard Burton and Thomas Carlyle. The latter extolled him as a "sovereign of iron energy and industry, of great and severe labor."

The strange mix in Francia, embodied in the novel's tiers of texts, conversations, notes, and commentaries, also reflects the truth of Roa Bastos's country, where the Guaraní Indian language flourishes side by side with Spanish, and

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literature is as much oral as printed. A truly Paraguayan writer, then, must simultaneously write in two languages and, at the same time, appear not to be writing at all. Roa Bastos inventively triumphs over both challenges.

Equally impressive, his translator, Helen R. Lane, commutes the conflicted narrative brilliantly, punishing every pun with an avenger's glee, cultivating all the rhetorical flowers, adding her own explanations to the annotations and glossary (printed at the back) that she has gleaned from Milagros Ezguerro's Spanish publication of *Yo el Supremo*. If the author pretends to compiling the book ("pretends," because the "Compiler," too, is another less than supreme figure in the book), the translator collaborates in producing not merely a translation but an English-language edition. The typographical intricacies (including handwritten portions) are beautifully, cogently presented by the publisher. As we read and study Roa Bastos's novel for years to come — and we will — we will increasingly learn about the art of translation, for this triplex, *Yo el Supremo*, has emerged as a *twin* masterpiece — in our language as well.

But let the reader beware: this is no easy read, no page-thumping, quick-study course in Latin American history

REVIEWERS

WILLIAM V. SHANNON *was for many years a Washington-based member of the* New York Times *editorial board. He now teaches history and journalism at Boston University.*

ROBERT JONES *works for a major publisher in New York City.*

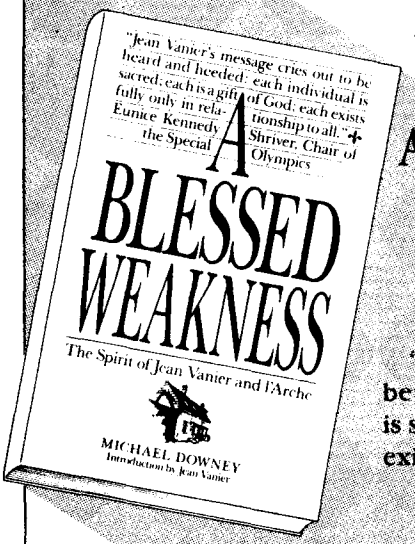
BARBARA A. BANNON *is the former editor-in-chief of the pre-publication book review section in* Publishers Weekly.

FATHER THEOPHANE BOYD, O.C.S.O., *is a Trappist monk residing at St. Benedict's Monastery in Snowmass, Colorado, where he is participating in an ongoing, Vatican-sanctioned project of Christian-Buddhist dialogue.*

FREDERICK FRANCK *is an artist and writer whose books include* The Zen of Seeing, *and* Echoes from the Bottomless Well *(Vintage).*

RONALD CHRIST, *managing editor of* Sites, *recently translated Manuel Puig's* Under a Mantle of Stars.

DAVID TOOLAN, S.J., *is an assistant editor of* Commonweal.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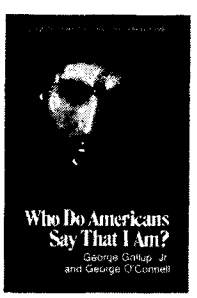

WHO DO AMERICANS SAY THAT I AM?

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and politics, no *One Hundred Years of Solitude* fantastic circus for readers of all ages. *I the Supreme* demands concentration, a welcoming rhetorical palate, and, I suggest, a browse through an encyclopedia's entries under "Paraguay" and "Francia." On the other hand, this maximal novel delights with a learned playfulness, a sophisticated modernity, an incredible factuality (such as the many-ton meteor Francia chains to his desk for being a runaway in the cosmos), and a many-ended detective story about identity and control (including self-control). This Supreme — just like the rest of us — produces powerful, not absolute, solutions. We read wonderingly by sewing and unsewing this crazy quilt of mutilated documents. No more than the recording author can the supreme dictator answer directly the question of who he is. "One can only speak of another," he says. "The I manifests itself only through the *He*. *I* do not speak to myself. I listen to myself through *Him*." After all, Francia may well ponder, perhaps he wrote the pasquinade himself. He dictated most of this novel.

The abdication of judgment

THE CULT OF INFORMATION
THE FOLKLORE OF COMPUTERS AND THE TRUE ART OF THINKING

Theodore Roszak
Pantheon, $17.95, 238 pp.

David Toolan

BEGINNING back in 1969 with *The Making of a Counterculture* and *Where the Wasteland Ends* in 1972, Theodore Roszak has tracked and assessed first the shock, then the mainstreaming, of sixties populist movements in the culture. Their precursors, he has not failed to point out, were early American utopianists, circuit-riders of the Great Awakenings, and the Romantic critics of industrial modernization — Blake, Wordsworth, Goethe.

Contrary to the popular impression, these were not books celebrating innocent barbarians in the streets, but essentially were about what the book under review calls *master ideas* — for instance, the "myth of objective consciousness," the eschatological visions of Herbert Marcuse, Paul Goodman, and Norman O. Brown, or the political meaning of William Blake's prophetic poems. However deafened we were when such ideas took the form of blocking commuter traffic, Roszak clearly thought the iconoclasm of the time deserved articulation and a hearing. The iconoclastic premise, one he obviously shares, is that what is repressed in our culture is not sex but a sense of transcendence.

The point was not just that he helped us understand flower children and SDS (maybe), but that in reviving, for instance, the Romantic protest against a reductionistic rationalism, he may have stretched our sense of the tradition of thought to which we belong. Consistently — and this is no less true of his critique of "the cult of information" in the present book — Roszak's hostility to technocracy has been based on a quest to understand the "true size of the mind." Which is why he has pursued the more seasoned *Hair* generation as it moved (with side trips to psychokinesis, apocalypticism, and Tarot) from LSD and Marcusean politics to Swami Muktananda and Thomas Merton.

From the outset a David against Goliaths, Roszak has been hurling stones at the mystifications of big bureaucrats, big technocrats, hidden corporate interests, and well-funded experts suffering from Newton's one-eyed sleep. In *Person/Planet* (Anchor, 1978), an extended midrash on E.F. Schumacher's plea for a decentralized, human-scale economy, he indicted urban-industrial dominance and bigness as such — as inimical to the wellbeing of the planet and the individual. In the name of participatory democracy, Roszak protests against what Lewis Mumford called the "pentagon of power" — the nation-state, mass mechanization, one-way styles of management, and the consumer paradise promised by mass-marketers.

Is he stuck, one sometimes wonders, in the romance of the primary group? Or is his critique of consumer culture all that different from Christopher Lasch's, or Alasdair MacIntyre's? The difference seems to lie, so far as I can figure it, in the models invoked toward a solution. More modestly, Lasch and MacIntyre appeal to Aristotle and the virtue-inducing kinds of work of the Athenian city state — whereas Roszak's latest model is derived from a medieval Benedictine monastery's ethos of "pray and work."

That's right. For the other side of jeremiad against conspiratorial bigness, explored in *Unfinished Animal* (Harper

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& Row, 1975), was the inward turn of the seventies. As Roszak read things, the turn to new transpersonal therapies and revived ancient spiritual disciplines represented neither a revolt of the masses nor a narcissistic ego trip but a middle-class revolt against massification and impotence. Problem: when you put together the theses of these latter two books, Aquarian politics seems to coincide — for very different reasons — with the "Reagan revolution" in its attack on big government and in its hero-worship of the entrepreneur. If there is more to it than action to save whales and seals, and I hope there is, it hasn't shown up yet at the national level — except maybe in Gary Hart's "new ideas."

So much for prelude and setting for the current book, which is a timely demythologization of an age of faith in the silicon chip. Here, however, Roszak takes aim at some of the gurus of a more business-oriented consciousness movement. For example, John Naisbitt, whose data-rich *Megatrends* may hold the distinction of being one of the century's most thoughtless books. Whoa!, says Roszak to the readers of *New Age* and *The Tarrytown Report*. This way lies folly.

The book begins with the parable of the "emperor's new clothes" — in this case the extravagant claims being made for salvation by machines heaping up mountains of undigested information more suitable for "Trivial Pursuits." Sample:

> The UIM [ultra-intelligent machine] will enable us to solve any practically soluble problem and we shall perhaps achieve world peace, the elixir of life, the piecemeal conversion of people into UIPs (ultra-intelligent people), or the conversion of the world's population into a *single* UIP.

As if sheer volume of data without quality ideas were the point. As if there were any such thing as "raw data" without governing (and questionable) assumptions. As if, *pace* the proponents of cognitive science and artificial intelligence, data-processing served as an adequate model of the human mind or substituted for the art of thinking.

Such hype, Roszak argues, overlooks the dark side, that computer technology has a built-in bias for the military-industrial complex (who paid the piper after all?). It can also invade privacy, subvert democratic values, disemploy, feed delusions of power and control, and corrupt political discourse by turning it into mere "facts." Roszak supplies telling examples of each sort of abuse — all fulfillments of Norbert Wiener's fear that cybernetics would fall "into the wrong hands." Roszak's impression is that it has fallen to the uses of the likes of Dickens's Mr. Gradgrind of *Hard Times*.

Roszak is at pains to deny he is any doctrinaire technophobe. This book was written on a word processor, and makes fascinating use of computerized data banks. Emperors deserve respect; so do computers. Yet the thing has been overdressed by the "data merchants." What needs to be stressed at this point, in the face of the mystifications of megatrenders and computer enthusiasts like MIT's Marvin Minsky, are the limits of the new

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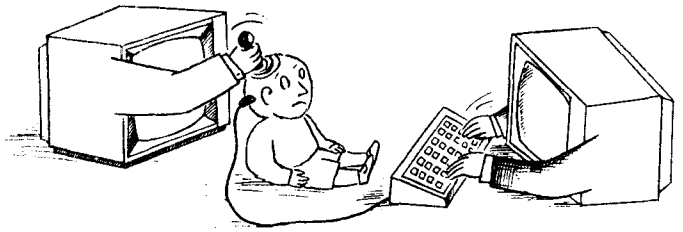

high tech, as well as its hidden curriculum (i.e., empiricist rationalism), and the potential to mask dubious political agendas. Above all, mere data-gathering, at whatever high speed, must be distinguished from master ideas — values, judgments, and the generative images by which we orient ourselves. Homely truth: the programmed data will be as good as the programmer's judgment, or as bad. At the core of the book stands an *apologia* for thinking — as involving more than a glut of information, more than a binary computer logic will ever encompass.

Toward the end of a chapter on "the politics of information" which contains warm appreciations of democratic networking, I.F. Stone, public libraries, and librarians, Roszak hands out this bit of advice to populist change-agents who may be tempted to hook into an expensive data bank. "For the price of the network subscription fee, the connect time, and the cost of a modem, one could subscribe to a dozen magazines and newsletters." Like *Commonweal*, maybe.

Evidently, nothing like a Blakean politics is anywhere near realization yet. *The Cult of Information* is testimony enough to that. In fact, as Roszak's account of Apple Computer shows, something funny happened to the "guerrilla hackers" on their way to spectacular success. They started out with solid countercultural credentials, firm believers in an "electronic populism"; cheap personal computers, which IBM, fat with government contracts, wasn't at all interested in, these hirsute folk thought they knew, would put power back in the hands of the people — by giving them access to data otherwise inaccessible to them. Well it didn't turn out that way. From Roszak's view anyway, it's a story of co-optation, a fall from innocence.

How long, Lord, how long?

In Brief

NO TIME TO GRIEVE . . . *By Helene Iswolsky. Winchell, $19.95, 287 pp.*

The fact is, there was plenty of time to grieve (Helene Iswolsky was seventy-nine when she died in 1975), and ample opportunity, as this autobiographical journey from prerevolutionary Russia to expatriation in France, to flight from Hitler and asylum in the United States, makes affectingly clear. But Helene Iswolsky never surrendered to such a temptation. Like Tolstoy's unforgettable Platón Karatáev, she invariably rose up like a loaf.

The daughter of the Czar's last ambassador to France, Iswolsky knew disruption and poverty in the wake of the 1917 Revolution. Highly cultured, deprived of spiritual roots, she became one of Paris's lost generation. But her conversion to Catholicism in 1923 led to a lifetime of work for ecumenism, promoting the search for understanding on both sides of the Atlantic.

She seems to have known everyone in the French and Russian enlightenments—both cultural and spiritual—of her time. When she came to America, she eked out a living, writing and lecturing. She taught at Fordham's Institute of Contemporary Russian Studies until ousted by Cold-War intrigues. She contributed often to these pages, as well as to *Jubilee, The Catholic Worker*, and *The Journal of Ecumenical Studies*. She was the driving force behind

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Correspondence

(Continued from page 290)

bother to quibble about dates and details. Unfortunately, Parker misses the nuances as well as the facts. He is able to portray Zimbabwe as a grim totalitarian state only by distorting or omitting essential points on every issue.

He forgets to tell readers that Prime Minister Robert Mugabe and his party were last year overwhelmingly re-elected in a multi-party election which even their toughest critics say was free and fair. Mugabe is one of only two or three democratically chosen African leaders.

Parker does a major disservice to the brave members of the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission by claiming that Zimbabwe's government pays no attention to church criticism. In fact, Justice and Peace has successfully pressed the government to halt some (though not all) serious human rights abuses.

Most important, Parker completely ignores the achievements which make Mugabe's government so popular with most Zimbabweans: the unbelievable advances in health, education, and economic opportunity experienced by the average person here since the overthrow of the pre-1980 apartheid-style government.

None of this means that Zimbabwe should be viewed uncritically — merely that it deserves the same complex and multi-dimensional reporting one would expect from *Commonweal* in reporting on, say, Nicaragua.

Zimbabwe is an unpredictably changing new nation full of contradictions. Its government combines an authoritarian impulse among some top leaders with important and growing elements of grass-roots decision-making power. A government which enjoys widespread support is guilty of severe human rights abuses against an ethnic minority. Zimbabwean officials bitterly denounce Amnesty International, yet this is the one of the few African countries where A.I. publications critical of the government can be bought in local bookstores.

Like Nicaragua, Zimbabwe has achieved incredible human services advances despite the terrible economic damage wrought by a powerful, destructive and hostile neighbor (South Africa, in Zimbabwe's case).

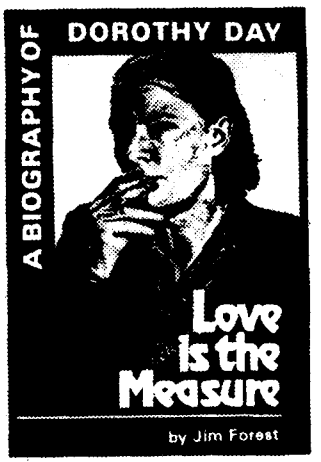
Zimbabwe's sophisticated mix of capitalism and socialism — ignorantly dismissed by Parker — offers the average Zimbabwean no "Marxist purgatory," but heaven on earth compared with the pre-1980 system. The Reagan administration is no friend of Zimbabwe, yet its annual country-by-country report on African economies (submitted to Congress by the U.S. Agency for International Development) last year said: "education and health services have been significantly expanded to population not previously reached, extension services in communal (peasant) lands have increased, and noticeable improvements have been made in expanding and improving rural roads as well as rural water supplies."

In agriculture, Zimbabwe offers the most hopeful model for food security on this badly wounded continent. A carefully designed farm policy helped peasants achieve production gains unparalled in Africa without alienating or undermining the white settlers who operate commercial farms as productive as any in the U.S.

These achievements don't excuse, and cannot be balanced against, the terrible brutality in Matabeleland. Yet, even there, a proper treatment of Zimbabwe would tell readers that torture and every other abuse occurred on an incomparably wider scale under white rule here, in neighboring South Africa or, sadly, under many black-led African governments. It would note that this government, unlike its predecessors, often heeds protests from the church and other human rights advocates. . . .

STEVE ASKIN

A Biography of Dorothy Day



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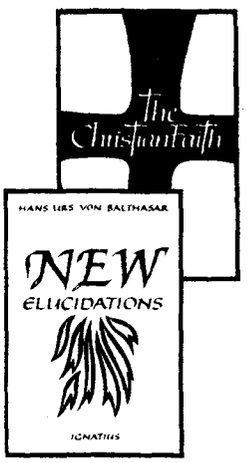

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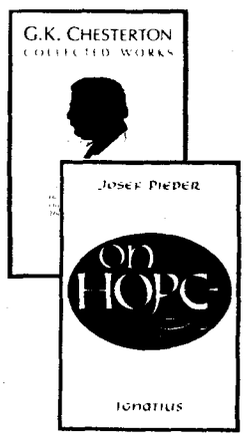

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